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## Lawsuit says immigration courts are now deportation machines

By ANDREW SELSKY  
Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — The immigration court system under the Trump administration has become a “deportation machine,” two groups said in a lawsuit filed in federal court on Wednesday. The lawsuit filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center in Washington, D.C., and Innovation Law Lab of Portland, Oregon, said that instead of being fair and impartial, judges in immigration courts answer to Attorney General Robert Barr and are pushed to deny applications for asylum. “The immigration courts make life-and-death decisions every day: vulnerable people seeking asylum in the United States depend on a functioning court system to protect them from persecution, torture, and death.

Continued on Page 2



In this Sept. 17, 2019, file photo, is the Migration Protection Protocols Immigration Hearing Facility, a new tent court facility made up of tents and portable pods along the Rio Grande in Laredo, Texas.

Associated Press

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## Lawsuit says immigration courts are now deportation machines

Continued from Front

Yet, in the immigration courts, the tradition of judicial independence has been turned upside down," the lawsuit against President Donald Trump and Attorney General William Barr says.

Melissa Crow, senior supervising attorney at the Southern Poverty Law Center and a lead attorney in the case, said that some parts of the United States have become "asylum-free zones" because immigration courts in 23 cities

have denied more than 85 percent of applications for asylum, with El Paso having the highest denial rate at 96.6%.

"We've come to call the current situation a deportation machine, and it really is because it is virtually impossible, particularly in some jurisdictions around the country, to effectively represent individuals in immigration court proceedings," Crow told The Associated Press in a joint telephone interview with Stephen Manning, executive director of Innovation

Law Lab.

The U.S. Department of Justice did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the lawsuit, which was filed in Portland, Oregon.

"The immigration court system is actually the central knot in the entire immigration policy debate," Manning said, adding that the Trump administration uses the immigration courts' dysfunctionality to justify increased detention and "totally inhumane practices" like forcing asylum seekers from Central America to re-



In this Sept. 17, 2019, file photo, migrants who are applying for asylum in the United States go through a processing area at a new tent courtroom at the Migration Protection Protocols Immigration Hearing Facility in Laredo, Texas.

Associated Press

main in Mexico or be flown to other countries.

"I swore to uphold the Constitution at my investiture. When the administration made it impossible to continue to do so, I resigned," Shugall said Wednesday at a telephone news conference organized by the plaintiffs. The judge who swore her in also resigned. To receive a satisfactory performance rating, immigration judges must decide approximately three cases per day and issue decisions on the merits of a case no more than 10 days after the final hearing, Crow said.

In some cases, judges would need to dig into the law and understand complicated facts but they instead have an incentive to deny a case, which is faster than granting asylum, to meet their performance goals, Crow said. Not meeting goals under a metrics policy instituted by the Trump administration can result in a judge being fired, the lawsuit says.

Pushing the judges to go

through cases faster is a dashboard on their computer that shows, in real time, progress in achieving the attorney general's performance metrics. Meters showing red, yellow or green indicate whether their cases are proceeding fast enough.

"It was very stressful," Shugall said. She eventually stopped opening the feature.

Some cases, on the other hand, are left dangling for as many as five years, making it harder for attorneys to find witnesses and evidence after all that time, Manning said.

Crow said this lawsuit has the potential to provide fairness to asylum seekers and others who have been the target the Trump administration's rhetoric and policies.

The law groups, which have represented immigrants, asked the federal court to require the attorney general to correct the dysfunction of the immigration court system. □

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# Justice Dept. plans crackdown on violent crime in 7 cities

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and COREY WILLIAMS  
Associated Press

**DETROIT (AP)** — The Justice Department announced a crackdown Wednesday aimed at driving down violent crime in seven of the nation's most violent cities. Attorney General William Barr released details of the initiative known as Operation Relentless Pursuit at a news conference in Detroit alongside the leaders of the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the U.S. Marshals Service. As part of the initiative, the Justice Department will intensify federal law enforcement resources in the seven cities — Detroit; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Baltimore; Cleveland; the Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, metropolitan area; Memphis, Tennessee; and Milwaukee — that have violent crime rates higher than the national average. "Fighting violent crime is one of the priorities of this administration," Barr said.



Detroit Police Chief James Craig, left, speaks as U.S. Attorney General William Barr, and FBI Director Christopher Wray listen during the announcement of a new national crime reduction initiative, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019, in Detroit.

"In a number of cities it's a stubborn problem. The federal government can't attack this problem alone. It depends on collaboration with state and local partners." The Justice Department will increase the number of federal law enforcement

officers in each of the cities and add additional officers to federal task forces. The department is also committing up to \$71 million in federal grant funds that can help fund the task forces, be used to hire new officers, pay overtime and purchase new equipment

and technology. The federal law enforcement agencies will work with local and state investigators to target violent criminals, members of drug cartels and gun traffickers by utilizing federal resources and intelligence. Agents will also utilize the ATF's na-

tional database known as NIBIN, or the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, which can help match images of bullet cases collected at crime scenes to link shootings. Targeting violent crime has been a top priority for the Justice Department, Barr and President Donald Trump. Barr, an ardent backer of law enforcement, was known for a tough-on-crime approach in his previous stint as the nation's chief law enforcement officer in the early 1990s as the national violent crime rate peaked. Those efforts, he has said, helped seriously cut violent crime. Still, Barr has also embraced a bipartisan criminal justice reform measure known as the First Step Act, which gives judges more discretion when sentencing some drug offenders, eases mandatory minimum sentences and encourages inmates to participate in programs designed to reduce the risk of recidivism, with credits that can be used to gain an earlier release. □

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# Legacy moment: Pelosi leads 'somber' Trump impeachment

By **LAURIE KELLMAN**  
Associated Press Writer

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The House's center of power took a seat toward the back of the chamber Wednesday. Her golden mace brooch, symbol of the House and the speaker's authority, glinted. Speaker Nancy Pelosi spent much of the historic day within a few steps of the cloakroom door, away from better-lit seats where the managers and members were debating impeachment. Only briefly, she stepped into the glare of the well.

"Today, as speaker of the House, I solemnly and sadly open the debate on the impeachment of the president of the United States," Pelosi said.

Like it or not, Pelosi's role leading Trump's expected impeachment will dramatically shape her legacy after more than 30 years in Congress. So in a town where body language and proximity often convey power, Pelosi went with a show of confidence, sitting quietly for long stretches flipping through other work, checking her phone and keeping an eye on the debate.

Being remembered for impeachment is not something she relishes after a career spanning six presidents, several wars, passage of the Affordable Care Act and her own debut as speaker, second in line to the presidency. But she said Trump had left the Democrats with "no choice" other than to act. Pelosi arrived in the chamber with Democrats largely unified, thanks to a careful balancing act that played out over several months. The House was impeaching Trump, as liberals had long demanded. The impeachment articles cen-



**House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of Calif., points to a poster as she speaks as the House of Representatives debates the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.**

Associated Press

tered on Trump's pressure on Ukraine, as moderates wanted. And a slate of other legislation was wrapped, giving all of the Democrats achievements to show off at home.

Pelosi's hold on the caucus made it possible for her to lead just by being there, rather than openly twisting arms as she had during passage of the health care law. Democrats lost the House the next year, and with it, Pelosi lost the speaker's post.

Back in possession of the gavel this year, Pelosi resisted impeachment until a whistleblower report revealed Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate his political rivals. That, she said, the House could not ignore. But neither would they celebrate it.

"He gave us no choice," Pelosi, clad in black, said from the well of the House.

Trump, a lifelong businessman now face-to-face with an equivalent branch of government, insists he is the victim of Democrats who have wanted to impeach him from the start.

He weighed in on Pelosi's legacy, too, predicting on Twitter she'll go down as history's "worst speaker." In a letter released on the eve of voting, he said Pelosi "is after the entire Republican Party."

Pelosi's ultimate power moment Wednesday was a stark departure from where she was a year ago, after the 2018 elections ushered in a new generation of lawmakers. Some newcomers, such as Virginia Rep. Abigail Spanberger, did not vote for Pelosi to return to the speakership.

But many more, such as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, ultimately helped put Pelosi back on top. What unfolded since then has been a study in Pelosi's ability to play the power game against Trump. Earlier this year, she forced him to retreat and reopen the government without the border wall he demanded. She then invited him to deliver his State of the Union speech from the House chamber — but during the event threw her particular brand of shade his way by

the meeting immediately after.


All along, even as she derided Trump's "manhood" in a private meeting, Pelosi resisted impeaching Trump. It was too divisive, and the country was already too divided, she said.

But in September, a group of new lawmakers from Trump-won districts, including Spanberger, gave Pelosi the cover to proceed with an impeachment inquiry. They wrote an op-ed published in The Washington Post supporting impeachment over Trump's conduct toward Ukraine.

"A solemn moment" has been Pelosi's message to Democrats throughout the Intelligence and Judiciary Committee hearings that followed. No more boasts that "we're going to impeach the motherf—ker," as freshman Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan declared on her first day in office. Democrats, Pelosi made clear in public and private, were not to celebrate when the House approves the articles of impeachment. □

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# Tennessee governor says state will keep resettling refugees

By JONATHAN MATTISE  
Associated Press

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)** — Tennessee won't stop resettling refugees, Republican Gov. Bill Lee said Wednesday, rejecting the option offered to states by President Donald Trump's administration.

The issue forced Lee, who campaigned on his Christian beliefs, to consider his own experience helping refugees and weigh it against the will of fellow Republicans in the Legislature. GOP lawmakers had sued the federal government over its refugee resettlement program and legislative leaders hoped Lee would accept Trump's offer.

"The United States and Tennessee have always been ... a shining beacon of freedom and opportunity for the persecuted and oppressed, particularly those suffering religious persecution," Lee said in a statement. "My administration has worked extensively to determine the best outcome for Tennessee, and I will consent to working with President Trump and his administration to responsibly resettle refugees."

Lee wrote that his decision is initially valid for a year. So far, no states have said they plan to reject refugees. About half the states have given written consent to continue resettling refugees to date.

In September, Trump slashed the number of refugees allowed into the U.S. and authorized state and local governments to refuse to accept them. An executive order says that if a state or a locality has not consented to receive refugees under the State Department's Reception and Placement Program, then refugees should not be resettled within the state or locality unless the secretary of state decides otherwise. Some resettlement groups have sued to block Trump's order. Tennessee stopped partici-

pating in the refugee program in 2008.

Catholic Charities of Tennessee administers a program under a law that says if a state withdraws, the federal government can pick a nonprofit to administer federal money for cash and medical assistance and social services to eligible refugees.

Even if a state opts out under Trump's order, refugees could still move there — but they wouldn't get funding for medical assistance and screenings, employment, social adjustment services and English language training.

More than 2,000 refugees resettled in Tennessee during the 2016 budget year. That number dropped to 478 in 2018 under Trump and has hit 692 in 2019. The Tennessee Legislature's fight against the refugee program was sparked in part by fears of refugees following terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, in 2015.

At the time, former Republican Gov. Bill Haslam urged the federal government to halt the settlement of Syrian refugees in Tennessee unless state agencies could get involved in the vetting process. Haslam later said he didn't think that people who are trying to do the country harm are coming in under a refugee program process that takes between 18 months and three years.

Attorney General Herbert Slatery declined the Republican-led legislature's request to sue the federal government over refugee resettlement, but lawmakers forged ahead with the help of a third-party legal outfit. The lawsuit has been rejected up to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. It's unclear whether they'll try to get the U.S. Supreme Court to weigh in.

House Speaker Cameron Sexton and Senate Speaker Randy McNally said in a joint statement that they would've preferred to "hit



In this Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019 photo **Fartun Abdi, a 25-year-old Somali** sits at work in Nashville, Tenn.

Associated Press

the pause button on accepting additional refugees in our state."

"I certainly know there's disagreement on this subject but there's disagreement around most subjects," Lee said. "You agree to disagree and move forward. But I think it's the right decision and we're moving forward on it."

Lee succeeded Haslam in January after a rough GOP primary in which he and his opponents echoed Trump's tough talk on immigration. He wrote Wednesday that he supports the lawsuit effort, saying it seeks to "bind and require the federal government to consult with the states."

Lee went to great lengths to tout his Christian faith while campaigning. Hundreds of evangelicals appealed to Lee's faith in a letter this month. In a letter Wednesday to McNally and Sexton, Lee said he's visited refugee camps on multiple continents and has helped refugees in Ten-

nessee for years.

"The refugee population in Tennessee is small, and I believe our consent to cooperate and consult with the Trump Administration to provide a safe harbor for those who are fleeing religious persecution and violent conflict is the right decision," Lee wrote.

Holly Johnson, who coordinates the Tennessee Office for Refugees within the Catholic Charities, said employers are "chasing down resettlement agencies because they know refugees work hard, they show up, they'll work overtime, they call when they're out," particularly during Tennessee's time of low unemployment. Multiple big local governments made it known that they wanted to keep accepting refugees, including Nashville, Knoxville, Chattanooga and Shelby County, which includes Memphis. Trump's order lets local governments decide on refugee resettlement if the state opts in. □

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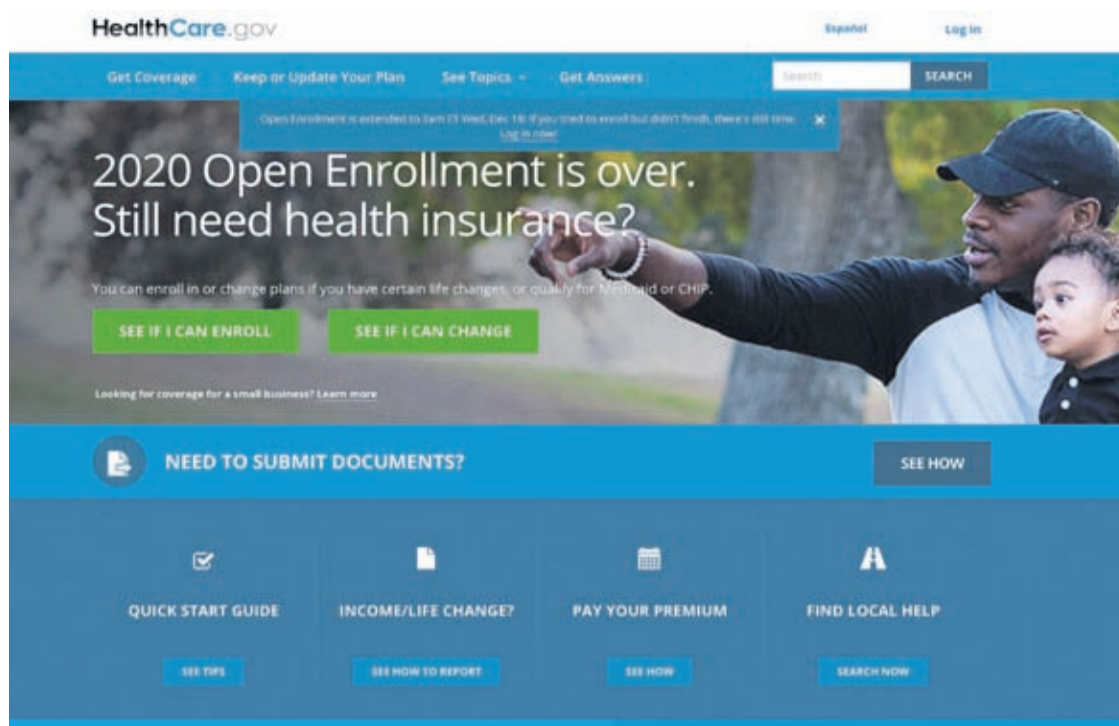
# Court: Part of 'Obamacare' invalid, more review needed

By **REBECCA SANTANA** and **MARK SHERMAN**  
**Associated Press**

**NEW ORLEANS (AP)** — The “individual mandate” of former President Barack Obama’s health care law is invalid, but other parts of the law need further review, a federal appeals court ruled Wednesday.

The court’s decision will not immediately affect the Affordable Care Act, President Barack Obama’s signature health care policy, which remains in place while the court case continues. The 2-1 ruling handed down by a panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans largely sidestepped what happens to some of the most popular parts of the Affordable Care Act such as protections for those with pre-existing conditions, Medicaid expansion and the ability for children under the age of 26 to remain on their parents insurance. The panel agreed with Texas-based U.S. District Judge Reed O’Connor’s 2018 finding that the law’s insurance requirement, the so-called “individual mandate,” was rendered unconstitutional when Congress, in 2017, reduced a tax on people without insurance to zero. The court reached no decision on the big issue — how much of the Affordable Care Act must fall along with the insurance mandate. The Act has remained in place while the question of its future has been litigated in court.

“It may still be that none of the ACA is severable from



This screen grab from the website HealthCare.gov shows the extended deadline for signing up for health care coverage for 2020.

the individual mandate, even after this inquiry is concluded. It may be that all of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate. It may also be that some of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate, and some is not,” Judge Jennifer Elrod wrote. O’Connor has to be more specific about which parts of the law can’t be separated from the mandate, and also must take into account Congress’ decision to leave the rest of the law essentially unchanged when it reduced the penalty for not having insurance to zero, Elrod wrote.

In dissent, Judge Carolyn Dineen King said her colleagues were prolonging “uncertainty over the future of the healthcare sector.” King would have found the mandate constitutional,

although unenforceable, and would have left the rest of the law alone.

“Without any enforcement mechanism to speak of, questions about the legality of the individual ‘mandate’ are purely academic, and people can purchase insurance—or not—as they please,” King wrote. “No more need be said; it has long been settled that the federal courts deal in cases and controversies, not academic curiosities.” California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who is leading state efforts to defend the law, promised a quick appeal to the Supreme Court.

“For now, the President got the gift he wanted -- uncertainty in the healthcare system and a pathway to repeal -- so that the healthcare that seniors, workers

and families secured under the Affordable Care Act can be yanked from under them,” Becerra said in a statement.

Attorney General Ken Paxton of Texas applauded the court’s decision to declare the mandate unconstitutional.

“As the court’s opinion recognized, the only reason the Supreme Court upheld Obamacare in 2012 was Congress’ taxing power, and without the individual mandate’s penalty that justification crumbled,” Paxton wrote. “We look forward to the opportunity to further demonstrate that Congress made the individual mandate the centerpiece of Obamacare and the rest of the law cannot stand without it.”

The court’s ruling ensures “Obamacare” will remain

a political issue during the 2020 election campaign, giving Democrats a line of attack against President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans. With the health law’s ultimate fate still in doubt, Democrats will argue that Republicans are trying to strip coverage away from 20 million Americans.

All the Democratic presidential candidates favor expanding coverage to the remaining 27 million uninsured, although their ideas range from building on the Obama health law to replacing America’s mix of private and public insurance with a single plan run by the government.

The decision comes after the conclusion of sign-up season for ACA coverage for next year. Technical glitches over the weekend had led to an extension until early Wednesday. That means the court ruling will not affect enrollment for 2020. The lawsuit followed congressional approval of a major tax cut in 2017, which included the reduction of the “Obamacare” tax on the uninsured to zero. The case came about because “Obamacare” opponents noted a splintered Supreme Court ruling of 2012 that upheld the law. In that decision, conservative justices had rejected the argument that Congress could require that everyone buy insurance. But Chief Justice John Roberts, joining four liberal justices, said Congress did have the power to tax those without insurance. □

## Baltimore ex-mayor charged with perjury by state prosecutor



In this June 8, 2018 file photo, Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh addresses a gathering during the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Boston.

Associated Press

By **BRIAN WITTE**  
**Associated Press**

**ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP)** — Baltimore’s disgraced ex-mayor has been charged with perjury for failing to disclose her business interest in a self-published children’s book, Maryland’s state prosecutor announced Wednesday.

Catherine Pugh, a Democrat who has pleaded guilty to federal charges related to her “Healthy Holly” books, failed to disclose her business interest in Health Holly, LLC on her financial disclosure forms when she was a Maryland state senator representing a Baltimore district.

Already facing the possibility of decades behind bars, the new charge carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

“Transparency from our elected officials is an essential aspect of protecting Maryland residents from corruption and political malfeasance,” said Charlton Howard, the state prosecutor, in a statement. “Our office is committed to ensuring that those who abuse positions of trust in our state and local governments are held accountable by the State of Maryland.” □

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## Ailing former WorldCom CEO ordered freed from prison

By LARRY NEUMEISTER  
Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — A former top executive sentenced to 25 years in prison in one of the largest corporate accounting scandals in U.S. history was ordered freed from prison Wednesday for medical reasons.

U.S. District Judge Valerie E. Caproni ordered the release of former WorldCom chief Bernard Ebbers after hearing lawyers discuss his medical problems. Ebbers was not in court and his lawyers said he was hospitalized Wednesday.

Several family members for Ebbers who attended the proceeding rejoiced, sobbing and hugging one another, when the judge announced her ruling. She said she'll issue a written ruling explaining her reasons at a later time.

"I'll get to hold his hand," one woman called out. Another threw her arms into the air as the judge stepped down from the bench.

Caproni said it fell within her discretion to order the early release after a lawyer cited severe medical prob-



In this Jan. 30, 2006, file photo former Worldcom CEO Bernard Ebbers exits Manhattan federal court in New York.

lems for the 78-year-old Ebbers and said his weight had dropped from above 200 pounds to 147 pounds last week.

The Mississippi-based WorldCom collapsed and went into bankruptcy in 2002, causing losses to stockholders, including people who

had invested through retirement plans.

The collapse followed revelations of an \$11 billion accounting fraud that included pressure by top executives on subordinates to inflate numbers to make the company seem more profitable.

WorldCom emerged from bankruptcy in 2004 and rebranded itself MCI, the name of a telecommunications company WorldCom bought years earlier. During bankruptcy, the company moved its headquarters from Clinton, Mississippi, to Ashburn, Virginia. In 2006,

Verizon Communications bought MCI.

The judge said she had received letters from some who never recovered from huge financial losses to say he should be left to die in prison.

But other letters were written in support.

Ebbers was convicted in New York in 2005 on securities fraud and other charges and received a 25-year sentence. He has been imprisoned since September 2006.

Attorney Graham Carner told the judge that Ebbers' health had gone into such steep decline that it was possible he might not live another 18 months. Among other problems, he suffers heart disease, he said.

"The situation for Mr. Ebbers is dire," he said.

He said Ebbers was transferred Wednesday to a private hospital from the Federal Medical Center in Ft. Worth, Texas, facility where he has been housed.

He said a colonoscopy scheduled for earlier this week was postponed because Ebbers was not medically fit for it. □

Associated Press



In this June 9, 2019, file photo, officials respond to the scene after a crane collapsed into Elan City Lights apartments amid severe thunderstorms in Dallas.

Associated Press

## Agency fines company \$26K for fatal Dallas crane collapse

**DALLAS (AP)** — A federal agency imposed a nearly \$26,000 fine against the owner of a crane that crashed through an apartment building near downtown Dallas, killing one resident and displacing hundreds.

The citation issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration

doesn't explain the cause of the collapse. Another nearby crane wasn't affected by the June 9 wind storm that the company blames for the damage. Bigge Crane and Rigging Co. owns the crane that fell onto the five-story Elan City Lights apartment building, killing a 29-year-old woman and injuring

five other people. At the time, wind gusts up to 71 mph (114 kph) shattered windows of high-rise buildings and tore trees apart, particularly in Dallas and its northern suburbs.

"I think really the only way (the cause is) ever going to get sorted out is probably through the lawsuits," Smith said. □

# Police gird for separatist protest at Barcelona soccer match

By **JOSEPH WILSON**

**Associated Press**

**BARCELONA, Spain (AP)** —

Thousands of police and private security personnel were deployed Wednesday in and around Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium to ensure that a demonstration by Catalonia's separatist movement does not disrupt one of the world's most-watched soccer matches.

Spanish league leader Barcelona hosts its fierce rival, No. 2 Real Madrid, and the separatists want to take advantage of the global media coverage to promote their bid for independence from Spain.

The game, known as El Clásico, was postponed from Oct. 26 because of fears that the separatists — then in the midst of a week of violent protests — would try to disrupt it.

Barcelona is the regional capital of the wealthy northeast region of Catalonia. Spain opposes any breakup of the country.

Protest organizers say that over 25,000 people have signed up to gather near the stadium and will try to get inside. Nearly 100,000 fans are expected to attend the match in what is



**Catalan pro-independence demonstrators block a road as they protest outside the Camp Nou stadium ahead of a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid in Barcelona, Spain, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.**

**Associated Press**

Europe's biggest stadium, and more than 3,000 police and security guards were on hand.

Hours before the kickoff at 1900 GMT (2 p.m. EST), police set up metal barriers around the stadium. A special police detail was to make sure the buses carrying the teams and match officials could arrive on time.

Dozens of protesters, some

waving Catalan pro-independence flags, began gathering at the Camp Nou stadium about four hours before the game.

The U.S. Consulate in Barcelona advised people to avoid the area or exercise caution if they are nearby.

"These demonstrations present the potential for violence between radical groups for and against the Catalan independence

movement," the alert read. "Demonstrations this autumn led to clashes between law enforcement, protesters, and counterprotesters."

Organizers have not said what form the protest will take, and police said they can't rule out an attempt by demonstrators to interrupt the match.

"The important thing is that we play the game," Real

Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said Tuesday.

The Barcelona team asked its fans to behave with civility and not to affect the match.

A shadowy online group called Tsunami Democratic, which is behind the protest, posted a message on social media saying: "Hello, world! Tonight Tsunami has a message for you."

Separatist sentiment grew sharply in Catalonia during the global recession that hit Spain hard. The 7.5 million residents of Catalonia are about equally divided by the secession question, according to polls and election results.

Separatists have used the Camp Nou stadium as a protest platform for years. They shout "Independence!" at a set time during matches and sometimes unfurl banners.

The Barcelona team has walked a fine line between supporting its fans' right to free expression and aligning itself with the greater interests of Catalonia. Many feel it does not fully support secession so as not to anger its Catalan fans who are not separatists or its millions of supporters across Spain. □

# Germany's Merkel criticizes US gas pipeline sanctions threat

By **GEIR MOULSON**

**Associated Press**

**BERLIN (AP)** —

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday criticized a U.S. move to impose sanctions related to a new Russian-German gas pipeline, signaling that she wants discussions with Washington but declining to threaten retaliation.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman said that the U.S. government's move violates international law and that the project will be completed regardless of the sanctions.

The U.S. has been an outspoken opponent of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which will transport natural gas about 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany. Along with eastern Eu-



**German Chancellor Angela Merkel takes questions as part of a meeting of the German parliament, Bundestag, at the Reichstag building in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.**

**Associated Press**

ropean countries that also oppose the project, the U.S. government argues that it will increase Europe's dependence on Russia for energy.

The U.S. House of Repre-

sentatives passed a bill last week that provides for sanctions against foreigners involved with ships laying sections of the pipeline. The Senate approved the bill Tuesday and it's now up

to President Donald Trump to sign it. "We are against extraterritorial sanctions, and not just since this decision yesterday — we also have this problem with a view to Iran," Merkel told German lawmakers, referring to the Trump administration's withdrawal from a deal between world powers and Iran meant to curb concerns over Tehran's nuclear program and the imposition of new sanctions.


"I see no alternative to conducting talks, though very firm talks, (to show that) we do not approve of this practice," Merkel said during a regular question-and-answer session in parliament. "We will see how things go with Nord Stream."

She noted that talks are under way on a new gas contract between Russia and

Ukraine, which fears being frozen out as a gas transit country as a result of Nord Stream 2's construction. Those talks are "relatively hopeful," and "it would be very inopportune if Ukraine lost transit fees" because of the negotiations being complicated by the dispute about the pipeline, she added.

A lawmaker from the far-right Alternative for Germany party prodded Merkel for a stronger response. Merkel rejected his charge that she had failed to defend herself in the past against Washington when it emerged that the National Security Agency had snooped on her cellphone. "We didn't back off on the NSA and we don't intend to do so here, either," Merkel replied. □





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## What will Boris Johnson do? UK leader to unveil policy plans

By JILL LAWLESS  
DANICA KIRKA  
Associated Press

**LONDON (AP)** — British voters have given Prime Minister Boris Johnson a commanding majority. But they have little idea what he plans to do with it, apart from taking the U.K. out of the European Union.

Johnson won last week's election with a pledge to "get Brexit done" by leaving the EU on Jan. 31, and a broad promise to end years of austerity in public spending.

Now Britain's Conservative prime minister has to turn his vague election pledges into political reality. That will start Thursday, when Johnson's government announces its legislative plans for the coming year in a speech read out in Parliament by Queen Elizabeth II. Anand Menon, director of the political think-tank U.K. in a Changing Europe, said with Johnson's 80-strong majority in the 650-seat House of Commons, he can govern however he wants. "But what we don't know is what he wants," Menon said Wednesday. "We've just had a so-called 'Brexit election' and yet we're not entirely certain what kind of Brexit this prime minister wants to deliver."

The Queen's Speech — written by the government but read by the monarch from atop a golden throne — will give the British public some idea of what drives Johnson, a politician whose core beliefs remain a mystery, even to his allies.

He sometimes acts like a Donald Trump-style populist — dubbing his administration a "People's Government" and banning his ministers from attending the elitist World Economic Forum next month in Davos, Switzerland. But he also



**Brexit supporters protest against Britain being in the European Union, outside the Houses of Parliament in London, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.**

Associated Press

claims to be a socially liberal "one nation" Tory who welcomes immigration and wants Britain to be a leader in tackling climate change. It's unclear which Johnson will be uppermost in Thursday's speech, which forms part of the ceremony-rich State Opening of Parliament. It usually takes place about once a year, but Britain saw its last state opening just two months ago, soon after Johnson took over as prime minister from Theresa May through a Conservative Party leadership contest and shortly before the early election that returned him to power.

For the queen's second visit this year, the pomp is being toned down. There will still be officials with titles like Black Rod and lords in ermine-trimmed robes. But the 93-year-old monarch will travel to Parliament in a car, rather than a horse-drawn carriage, and will wear a hat rather than a diamond-studded crown.

A central piece of legislation will be Johnson's With-

drawal Agreement Bill, the law needed to make Brexit a reality. It must become law before Jan. 31 if Johnson is to stick to his timetable, and the government plans to hold the first significant vote on it Friday.

The bill commits Britain to leaving the EU on Jan. 31 and to concluding trade talks with the bloc by the end of 2020. Johnson insists he won't agree to any more delays — a vow that has set off alarm bells among businesses, who fear that means the country will face a "no-deal" Brexit at the start of 2021.

Trade experts and EU officials say striking a free trade deal within 11 months will be a struggle. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the timetable "extremely challenging." Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, said "it won't be possible ... in this limited time, to do everything. But we will do everything we can."

Thursday's speech is also set to include a bill to overhaul

Britain's immigration system after Brexit, when EU citizens will lose the automatic right to live and work in the U.K. Beyond Brexit, there's likely to be a spending boost for the National Health Service, which has struggled to keep up with growing demand during a decade-long funding squeeze by previous Conservative governments.

Johnson loves big infrastructure projects, and in the past has floated everything from a "Boris Island" airport in the River Thames to a bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland. Improving dire train services in northern England is a more likely priority for his government.

There may also be tough-sounding announcements on law and order. After two people were killed last month in London by an attacker who had served a prison sentence for terrorist crimes, Johnson said he would end early prison releases for serious offenders. Johnson will make his mark

on the government more decisively in the new year. He's expected to shake up his Cabinet and merge or even eliminate some ministries — all under the guiding eye of chief adviser Dominic Cummings, a self-styled political disruptor.

Johnson will also have to wait to see how Brexit affects the U.K. economy. A downturn could hamper the government's plans to spend more on public services. Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London, said Conservative prime ministers from Margaret Thatcher to Theresa May all took office promising, like Johnson, to "heal the nation" and tackle social injustice.

"But actually in the end ... they don't want to spend too much money, they don't want to raise taxes too high, they don't want to regulate the economy — and actually nothing much happens," he said. "So don't hold your breath."

Meanwhile, politicians from the opposition Labour Party have begun jostling to become the party's next leader in the wake of its crushing election defeat. Labour lost 60 seats, securing only 203, as voters rejected its complex Brexit stance and its hard-left leader, Jeremy Corbyn. Labour Brexit spokesman Keir Starmer, foreign policy spokeswoman Emily Thornberry and lawmakers Lisa Nandy and Yvette Cooper all say they are considering running to replace Corbyn next year. Former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair — whose centrist policies were rejected by Corbyn — blamed the election debacle squarely on Corbyn. Blair said the party had become "marooned on Fantasy Island" and urged it to change course quickly. □

# Lebanon's caretaker PM no longer candidate for post

By ZEINA KARAM

Associated Press

**BEIRUT (AP)** — Lebanon's caretaker prime minister said Wednesday he's no longer a candidate for the post, eliminating himself from consideration on the eve of scheduled consultations between the president and parliamentary blocs for naming a new premier.

The move by Saad Hariri comes amid much uncertainty and heightened tensions following recent violence. There were several days of confrontations involving security forces and anti-government protesters as well as supporters of Lebanon's two main Shiite groups, Hezbollah and Amal. They torched cars, smashed window shops and burned trees in central Beirut. Police have responded with tear gas and rubber bullets.

The violence threatened to plunge Lebanon further into chaos and ignite sectarian strife amid two months of anti-government protests and a spiraling financial crisis. Politicians meanwhile, have been unable to agree on a new government since Hariri resigned Oct. 29 in response



In this Oct. 25, 2019 file photo, an anti-government protester holds up a Lebanese national flag during a protest in Beirut, Lebanon.

to unprecedented, nationwide protests. Those demonstrations were sparked by a tanking economy and united the Lebanese against their leaders.

The western-backed Hariri has insisted on a government of specialists to deal with the economic and financial crisis, while others including Hezbollah demand a government that includes all major political parties — much like Hariri's

unity government that was brought down.

"It has become clear to me that, despite my categorical commitment to forming a government of specialists, the positions ... are not changing, I therefore announce that I will not be a candidate to form the next government," Hariri said in a statement Wednesday.

The statement said Hariri's bloc in parliament will meet Thursday morning, ahead

of the scheduled consultations with President Michel Aoun, to determine who it will name as their candidate for PM.

A mob attacked the office of a Sunni Muslim religious leader in the northern city of Tripoli, smashing in windows early Wednesday, Lebanon's official news agency and the military said. The assailants then moved to one of the city's main squares and set fire

Associated Press

to the traditional Christmas tree.

The violence indicated that tensions that have recently gripped the Lebanese capital, Beirut, fueled by an online video deemed offensive to the country's Shiite Muslims, are spreading to Tripoli, the country's second-largest city. The city is predominantly Sunni. The military said a mob of men on motorcycles gathered outside the home of Sunni Mufti Sheik Malek al-Shaar and rioted, "used profanity" and smashed property. The mob then moved to the square and threw fire bombs at the Christmas tree, setting it on fire. The military said it arrested four men and confiscated their motorcycles.

On Tuesday, anger boiled over in Beirut after the offensive video was widely circulated online. It showed a Sunni resident of Tripoli railing against the leaders of the country's two main Shiite groups, Hezbollah and Amal, and religious Shiite figures and using expletives. Their supporters descended on a protest camp in Beirut as security forces intervened to push them back, setting off hours of pitched street battles. □

# Rights group slams Greek migrant camp conditions for minors

By ELENA BECATOROS

Associated Press

**ATHENS, Greece (AP)** — Hundreds of unaccompanied children are living in "inhuman and degrading" conditions in a migrant camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, putting their mental and physical well-being at risk, an international human rights organization said Wednesday.

Human Rights Watch researchers visited the Moria camp in mid-October and interviewed 22 of the 1,061 unaccompanied children who were registered there at the time. The children they interviewed, the youngest of whom were age 14, described having little or no access to care and specialized services.

The camp on the Aegean Sea island has a separate



In this Thursday, Oct. 3, 2019 file photo a Syrian boy plays with a toy car at the Moria refugee and migrant camp on the Greek island of Lesbos.

Associated Press

section for minors who arrived without adult guardians. Because of overcrowding, most of the children Human Rights Watch interviewed were living either among Moria's gen-

eral population or just outside the camp in an olive grove where migrants and refugees have set up their own tents.

"Hundreds of lone children on Lesbos are left to fend

for themselves, sleeping on mats and cardboard boxes, exposed to worsening and dangerous weather conditions," Human Rights Watch quoted its Greece researcher, Eva Cosse, as saying in a statement. "The Greek authorities need to urgently make sure these children are safe and cared for."

Iris Pandiri, a social worker with the non-governmental organizations Arsis Association for the Social Support of Youth, said official figures showed about 5,300 unaccompanied children were in Greece by the end of November, of which only 1,932 were in specialized housing for lone children.

"I think the truth is that we are experiencing one of the most dramatic times, with a huge number of unaccom-

panied children in precarious housing an care," said Pandiri, who is responsible for unaccompanied children's housing for Arsis. The group currently provides housing for more than 600 children.

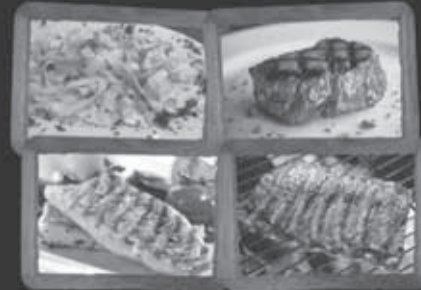
Under a deal between the European Union and Turkey to stop migrant flows into Europe, those who arrive on Greek islands from the nearby Turkish coast are held in island camps pending deportation unless they successfully apply for asylum in Greece.

Only asylum-seekers considered to be in vulnerable groups are eligible to be moved to facilities on the mainland. Continued arrivals coupled with a backlog in asylum applications has led to dramatic overcrowding of the camps. □

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## China commissions first home-built aircraft carrier

**Associated Press**

**BEIJING (AP)** — President Xi Jinping attended the commissioning of China's first entirely home-built aircraft carrier, underscoring the country's rise as a regional naval power at a time of tensions with the U.S. and others over trade, Taiwan and the South China Sea. The Shandong is the second Chinese aircraft carrier to enter service after the Liaoning, which was originally purchased as a hulk from Ukraine and entirely refurbished.

State media reported that about 5,000 representatives from the naval forces and aircraft carrier construction groups attended the commissioning ceremony Tuesday at a naval base near the city of Sanya.

The base in the southern island province of Hainan opens onto the South China Sea, where China

is engaged in an increasingly heated dispute over territory and undersea oil and gas resources. China's claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway, through which passes an estimated \$5 trillion in trade annually, overlaps partially or in whole with five other governments. Countries in the region, along with U.S. treaty allies including Japan and Australia, are also beefing up their navies and maritime law enforcement capabilities in response to Chinese actions such as the construction of man-made islands that Beijing has equipped with airfields and missile batteries.

State television footage showed Xi being applauded as he boarded the ship to present a flag and certificate, sign the log and visit with sailors. He also inspected aircraft and toured the bridge and flight coordina-



In this photo provided by China's Xinhua News Agency, Chinese President Xi Jinping, center, meets with representatives of the aircraft carrier unit and the manufacturer at a naval port in Sanya, south China's Hainan Province, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019. Associated Press

tion operations center. "Commending China's achievements in aircraft carrier construction, Xi encouraged them to continue their efforts to make new contributions in the service of the party and the people," the official Xinhua News Agency reported. Like the Liaoning, the Shan-

dong is named after a northern province and is based on a Soviet design with a "ski jump" style flight deck for takeoffs rather than the flat decks used by much larger U.S. aircraft carriers. It is powered by a conventional oil-fueled steam turbine power plant, rather than the nuclear fuel

American carriers and submarines use.

The 50,000-ton Shandong completed sea trials last year before returning to its construction yard in the northern port of Dalian. Following the arrival of its air complement Chinese J-15 fighter jets, it was due to be commissioned before 2020. It sailed through the Taiwan Strait on its way to Hainan last month, prompting the island's military to scramble ships and planes to monitor its passage.

China is seen as striving to overtake the U.S. as the dominant naval power in Asia and already boasts the world's largest navy in numbers of vessels. Beijing says aircraft carriers are needed to protect its coastline and trade routes, but they are also seen as backing up Beijing's claims to self-governing Taiwan and the South China Sea. □

## Indonesia parades 6 foreigners arrested for drugs on Bali

**By FIRDIA LISNAWATI**

**Associated Press**

**DENPASAR, Indonesia (AP)**

— Indonesian authorities said Wednesday that they have arrested six foreigners for allegedly trying to smuggle drugs onto the tourist island of Bali.

A Swiss man, a Thai man, a Singaporean woman, a Chilean man and two Hong Kong men wearing orange detainee uniforms were paraded with their feet and hands tied at a news conference in Denpasar, the capital of Bali province. The customs spokesman for the Bali and

Nusatenggara regional office, Wachid Kurniawan, said the suspects were arrested separately since last month upon arrival at the airport. Kurniawan said the Swiss man was arrested Nov. 4 with a total of 30.04 grams (1.06 ounces) of marijuana in his luggage. Two days later, customs officers nabbed the Thai man with 17.76 grams (0.6 ounce) of marijuana concealed in his underwear. He said the Singaporean woman was captured Nov. 14 after immigration officer found a small plastic bag with 0.35 gram (0.01 ounce) of co-

caine inside her passport, while the Chilean man was nabbed two weeks later with 77.26 grams (2.7 ounces) of liquid methamphetamine in his black suitcase. The Hong Kong man was arrested Dec. 4 with 3.2 kilograms (7 pounds) of crystal methamphetamine in his luggage, and his 19-year-old fellow Hong Kong national was captured last week with 4 kilograms (8.8 pounds) of crystal methamphetamine wrapped in four branded pet food packaging in his luggage, Kurniawan said. Indonesia has extremely



Foreign suspects detained for drugs charges sit during a press conference in Bali, Indonesia, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.

Associated Press

strict drug laws, and convicted smugglers are some-

times executed by firing squad. □

# Mexico president opposes bill to end church-state separation

By **PETER ORSI**

**Associated Press**

**MEXICO CITY (AP)** — President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Wednesday he does not support a proposal to further relax Mexico's strict legal separation of church and state, throwing cold water on a draft bill that would upend long-standing political doctrine in the country.

López Obrador said the initiative, presented last week by a senator from his leftist Morena party, is something that "should not be touched" and "was resolved over a century and a half ago."

The proposal would modify the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship to eliminate historic language enshrining the "separation of the State and churches."

Among specific measures, it would reportedly allow religious groups greater access to all manner of media, including TV, radio and newspapers, relax regulations on church ownership of property, provide for cooperation between church and state on cultural and social development and allow "conscientious objections" to law on religious grounds.

It would let ecclesiastical authorities do spiritual



**Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador listens to questions during his daily morning press conference at the National Palace in Mexico City, Friday, Nov. 29, 2019.**

**Associated Press**

work in government facilities such as hospitals, rehab centers and even military installations.

López Obrador's party and allies control both houses of Mexico's Congress, and without the president's support, it's hard to imagine the bill winning approval.

The Mexican state long had an antagonistic relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. Nineteenth-century reforms championed by López Obrador's hero Benito Juárez reigned in re-

ligious domination of much of the nation's life and the state actively persecuted the Roman Catholic church in the early part of the 20th century, prompting a civil war known as the "Cristiada."

Many of the tougher anti-clerical laws have been eased in modern times, particularly around the 1979 visit of Pope John Paul II, but separation of church and state remains firmly entrenched as a core political concept.

"I do not think that modifying this principle helps — on the contrary," López Obrador said. "... I think everyone, the majority of Mexicans, agrees that the lay state should prevail, which the constitution establishes." The president said the lay state is not anti-religious, but rather guarantees the rights of believers and non-believers alike.

"Render unto God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's" López Obrador said.

The office of Sen. Soledad Luévano Cantú, who proposed the initiative, did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment. On Tuesday she said via Twitter that the initiative was hers alone and not authored by the president or their party, and that she believes in the rule of law and the lay state.

"With respect, tolerance and without taboos, we can work together so that thousands of religious associations in our country can help Mexico become a country where we all live better-off," Luévano wrote. She described her faith as "Guadalupana" — that is, as a devotee of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is the Roman Catholic patroness of Mexico but also resonates with millions of non-

Catholics in the country. Andrew Chesnut, professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, said Luévano's initiative would appear to benefit mostly evangelicals and other minority religious groups in a country where 81% are Roman Catholic and the church enjoys more influence than probably anywhere else in the hemisphere, despite the legal separations between church and state.

López Obrador, who has described himself as a Christian "in the broad sense," allied during the 2018 presidential campaign with a small political party heavily influenced by evangelical churches, and observers say his discourse often tends toward the quasi-religious or even messianic. Chesnut said evangelicals likely see an opportunity to win more space in Mexican society under the administration of a "fellow traveler."

But López Obrador's comments Monday reflect the political inviability of the proposal after criticism came from across the political and religious spectrum, including both Catholics and the non-religious, Chesnut added: "The lay state in Mexico almost has a kind of sacred status." □

# Puerto Rico heading into showdown over US ban on cockfights

By **DANICA COTO**

**Associated Press**

**SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico**

**(AP)** — Puerto Rico defied the U.S. government by adopting a law on Wednesday to keep cockfighting alive, seeking to protect a 400-year-old tradition on the island despite a federal ban that goes into effect this week.

Those in the cockfighting business cautiously rejoiced amid concerns over the U.S. territory trying to sidestep a federal law that President Donald Trump signed a year ago. "We are certainly challenging a federal law. We know what that implies," Rep. Gabriel Rodríguez



**Governor Wanda Vazquez signs a bill into law in favor of cockfighting, despite a federal ban that goes into effect this week, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.**

**Associated Press**

Aguiló, who co-authored the bill, told The Associated Press late Tuesday before the announcement was made public.

Rodríguez said he expected the fight to end up in federal court.

As word spread, those in the cockfighting industry

cheered the news as some met with Gov. Wanda Vázquez, who announced Monday that she plans to run in the island's 2020 general elections.

"There's going to be work!" exclaimed Domingo Ruiz, who owns more than 30 cocks and has spent more than half a century in the business. "We're going to keep the fight alive."

Cockfighting generates an estimated \$18 million a year and employs some 27,000 people, according to the bill approved by Puerto Rico's House and Senate. The island's legislators had bristled at Trump's move, noting in their bill that cockfights and bet-

ting on them have been "part of our culture and folklore ever since their introduction to Puerto Rico in the 17th century."

Puerto Rico has 71 cockfighting establishments in 45 municipalities licensed by the island's Department of Sports and Recreation, said Secretary Adriana Sánchez. She defended the cockfighting tradition and contended the U.S. government banned fights for economic and not animal welfare reasons.

Sánchez said a ban would just drive the fights underground on an island mired in a 13-year recession and still struggling to recover from Hurricane Maria. □

# LOCAL



## Culture for Christmas



**ORANJESTAD** — As the last weeks of this year are approaching and a new decade is before us, it is essential to highlight an irreplaceable traditional intangible cultural heritage of Aruba, the Dande. Even though between Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao there are many shared cultural traditions, the Dande is something uniquely from Aruba and can't be found on the other islands.

According to UNESCO, cultural heritage "does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts".

While delicate, intangible cultural heritage is a significant aspect in preserving cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization. The general understanding of intangible cultural heritage of different communities on Aruba helps with intercultural discourse, community cohesion and supports mutual respect for other ways of life. The meaning of intangible cultural heritage is not only the cultural manifestation but rather the richness that is diffused from one generation to the next.

UNESCO reiterates that "the social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones". Summarized we can conclude that Intangible Cultural Heritage is: 1. Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time; 2. Inclusive; 3. Representative; and 4. Community-based.

### Dande

The most traditional cultural intangible heritage Aruba has throughout the Christmas season is called Dande. The Dande is a local oral tradition where the song "ay nobe" (aña nobo) – "new year" is performed as the New

Year is approaching or has arrived. Dande stems from the word Dandalia, which loosely translates into "to party, he who parties, or simply paranda". The first sentence of the Dande song "oh dande

nos a jega na bo porta" – Ay Nobe, translated means "Oh the party has arrived at your door" – New Year. The origin of the Dande is not known, however there are many theories such as; 1. Its starting in the district

of Savaneta, 2. Its starting in the district of Noord, 3. Its popularity strengthened in the district of St. Cruz, or 4. Its starting after the abolition of slavery in 1863 by the Dutch King.

**Continued on Page 14**

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# Culture for Christmas

Continued from Page 13

A group of five or sometimes even six people (one singer accompanied by numerous musicians) usually performs the most known Aruban end of the year tradition. These people, usually family members accompany a singer and travel door-to-door to express their best wishes for the New Year in repetitive phrases (blessings), with a chorus that includes the phrase "ay nobe" (aña nobo) – "new year" – sung after each blessing. Currently, the celebratory travel usually leads to the houses of the singers' friends and family, where the singer collects money in his hat to give to the group. Traditionally the removal of the singer's hat is considered a sign of respect he/she is expressing to the family and person they are singing to and blessing. Instead of money, back in the day, the singer would receive food (for example pan dushi "sweet bread") in their hat as a token of gratitude for their long trip. The singer starts by blessing the head of the house and then one by one passes to every person present. Besides visiting local houses on New Year's Eve and the day after, the Dande tradition is very popular on the last working day of the year. Local businesses invite a Dande group to come and bless their workers and the company as the New Year approaches.

This tradition is so prominent in the Aruban culture that a festival was organized four decades ago to preserve this cultural tradition for the future in a form of a competition. In 1973 Harry

Croes took the initiative of organizing a Dande Festival considering the declining popularity of the Dande and also with the hope of preserving the one unique cultural heritage tradition of the island. Originally the Dande Festival was for adults only, but 12 years ago Commission Promove Cultura organized the first festival for children and teenagers. Now, this festival is very popular and many tipico's "local bands" and performers compete every year to receive the ultimate prize, becoming the Dande King or Queen. It is considered a big honor each year as children, young adults and adults participate and help the Aruban tradition stay alive.

### UNESCO World Heritage List vs. Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO is internationally known for their World Heritage List of Tangible heritage sites all over the world. These sites include landmarks, buildings, and other tangible artifacts. Many



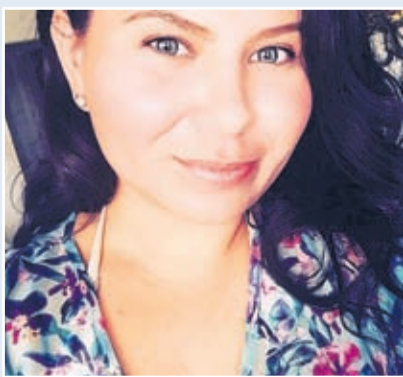
culture loving people travel to numerous countries just to visit these sites. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a program initiated in 2001 by UNESCO to recognize and protect various cultures and practices that, unlike items on the UNESCO World Heritage List, cannot be touched. Therefore, Intangible cultural heritage "includes song, music, drama, skills, crafts, and the other parts of culture that can be recorded but cannot be touched and inter-

acted with, without a vehicle for the culture". UNESCO divides the list into three different categories: 1. The representative list comprises cultural "practices and expressions that help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance"; 2. The safeguarding list is composed of cultural elements that are threatened and in need of urgent measures to keep them alive; 3. The best practice list is comprised of the best

examples by communities and governments of the protection and recognition of intangible cultural heritage. Practices that can be accepted within these categories include: Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; Performing arts; Social practices, rituals and festive events; Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and Traditional craftsmanship. The hope remains that Aruba and all relevant Aruban Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) help safeguard the Dande tradition internationally.



Next year, further discussion will be provided on the topic on ICH and how Aruba can be part of the world's biggest cultural safeguarding community. But, in the spirits of Christmas, the Creative Islander would like to extend its best holiday wishes to you and your entire family during the Christmas season. The gift of love. The gift of peace. The gift of happiness. May all these be yours at Christmas and throughout the New Year. Till next year! □



**Biography** - Thaïs G. Franken (24) is a recently graduated Aruban student at the University of Maastricht (UM). She obtained her graduate double master of science degree in Public Policy and Human Development in collaboration with the United Nations University Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT). Back home, on the beautiful island of Aruba, she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Organization, Governance & Management (OGM) at the University of Aruba (UA), where she successfully defended her thesis titled "Placing Culture and Creativity at the Heart of the Aruban Sustainable Development". It was precisely this research project that inspired the emergence of the "Creative Islander" column in 2018. Thaïs is very passionate about topics such as sustainability, innovation, culture, creativity, social entrepreneurship and their role in public management. Next to her academic interests, she enjoys reading, writing, dancing and cooking.

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## Commemorating 60 years: Special gift presented to Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino

**PALM BEACH —** Aruba's first luxury hotel opened its doors back in 1959 and during the whole year of 2019 they have been celebrating their 60th anniversary.

We are talking about Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino which was inaugurated originally on July 18th 1959 under the name of Aruba Caribbean Hotel, with this the gates were opened to tourism to our island.

More than 60 years ago, two politicians of that time, namely Oscar Henriquez and Juancho Irausquin, had a wonderful vision: Expand Aruba's tourism. The opening of what was a luxury hotel was the start of a new era for the Aruban economy.

Let's go back in history: Pri-



or to World War II the Lago Refinery used to be Aruba's main economic pillar. After the war and due to the process of automatization, Lago Refinery decided to reduce personal and this caused for a massive unemployment on Aruba. The two politicians, Henriquez and Irausquin, were search-

ing for methods to exalt Aruba's economy. They envisioned that with Aruba's white beaches, pleasant climate and friendly and hospitable people, Aruba could become a perfect destination for tourism. At that time there were only two hotels: the Coral Strand Hotel, currently known as

Talk of The Town, which was built in 1943 and Basi Ruti Hotel, built in 1954, currently known as Playa Linda Beach Resort.

With the construction and opening of the Aruba Caribbean Hotel, or also known in the community as 'The Grand Dame' the

economy and infrastructure of Aruba started to expand.

Nowadays, Aruba has an average of 1.8 million visitors per year to which 42.3% are 'stay-overs' at a high rise hotel with Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino being one of them with a total of 357 rooms.

Aruba Tourism Authority CEO Ronella Tjin Asjoe-Croes together with CMO Sanju Luidens-Daryanani presented the award to Vasco Baselli – General Manager of the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino.

Congratulations Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino for your continuous dedication to the development of Aruba's tourism on behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority and the entire community of Aruba! □

## The Kitchen Table enters fifth year of gastronomic success on NEW location: A very fine culinary journey of Caribbean and Peruvian fusion cuisine



**EAGLE BEACH** — The Kitchen Table is an elegant, classy, intimate, high-quality restaurant with an exceptional dining set-up. Dining here is an experience, a kind of sitting- at your- best- friend's or family's kitchen table where you feel and taste that the food contains love. Are you looking for something different, an ecstatic foody trip, than this is where you need to go.

your book of vacation memories, as it stands out from the regular island dinners.

### It is all about consistency

The Peruvian-born Roxanna Salinas and her husband Jan van Nes are the secret formula behind The Kitchen Table's success. The couple takes a personal approach to what they do, this is not about running a business as usual. This is more about making you feel welcomed home, as well as being pampered. They bring top hospitality, experience and authenticity to the table. Within this gourmet dinner concept the two blended the Peruvian culinary art of Roxanna's top kitchen team and Jan's expertise from The Kitchen Table. The result is one big trip of delight, indulge and tickling of your taste buds. The Kitchen Table welcomes you with open arms every Tuesday to Saturday.

### Peruvian touch

In the last ten years, Peru has been recognized as one of the world's best culinary destinations, and for seven consecutive years, the South American country has won the award for the Best Culinary destination at the Worlds Travel Awards. Biodiversity combined multiculturalism are the reasons why Peru is so rich in gastronomy. You can travel through the last 500 years, touch a mix of cultures whenever you taste authentic Peruvian cuisine. The Kitchen Table brings this epicurean delicacies to Aruba paired perfectly with the best wines and they will make you understand why Peru is at the height of today's gastronomy. □

The 7-8 course gastronomic journey will start with sparkling wine at the patio of The Kitchen Table's new location at Paradise Beach Villas as of 6.45PM. Around 7.00PM guests will be guided for a memorable dinner on the second floor of the other popular restaurant Asi es mi Peru. The dining concept reflects extraordinary, elegant and exquisite dishes from the Caribbean, Peruvian fusion and international cuisine created by the owners, Chef David Lizano and his team. To pair the perfect wines three sommeliers were invited to make the section. The interior of the restaurant is if you were in an elegant establishment in Lima, the capital city of Peru. You feel elevated in the top of the building where dinner takes place in an intimate setting. The typical, colorful Peruvian fabrics dress the ceiling while the large windows dignify the room. There are only 16 seats available creating an intimacy underlined by the owner's personal attention. "This is an amazing experience," says Robert J. Giordanella from New York. "The food is truly divine," shares a local guest. An evening at The Kitchen Table will be noted as unforgettable in



The Kitchen Table is open from Tuesday to Saturday. Have a peak on their website [www.thekithcentableinaruba.com](http://www.thekithcentableinaruba.com) or call them at +297-5932173.

## Emerald for John Patrick Balzarini

**PALM BEACH** —Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor one of Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as an Emerald Ambassador of Aruba. The Emerald Ambassador certificate is presented to guests who visit Aruba 35 years and more consecutively.

The honoree was John Patrick Balzarini from USA. Balzarini has been visiting Aruba for 35 years consecutively. The Emerald Ambassador certificate is the highest certificate that we present, and is given to visitors who have been visiting Aruba 35 years or more consecutively. The ceremony was one of importance to us because honoring visitors who have been coming to

Aruba for over 35 years is incredibly rare and it was a very memorable moment for all of us.

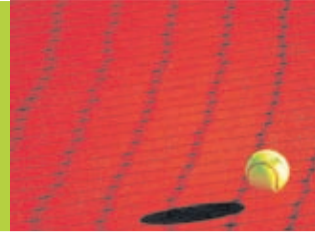
Balzarini stated that he loves the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, delicious variety of foods, its safety and Aruba's warm and friendly people who became like family to him.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Holiday Inn Beach Resort & Casino presented the certificate to the honoree, handed over some presents and also thanked him for choosing Aruba as his favorite vacation destination and as his home-away-from-home. □





# SPORTS



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) shoots over Indiana Pacers guard Malcolm Brogdon (7) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Indianapolis, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019.

Associated Press

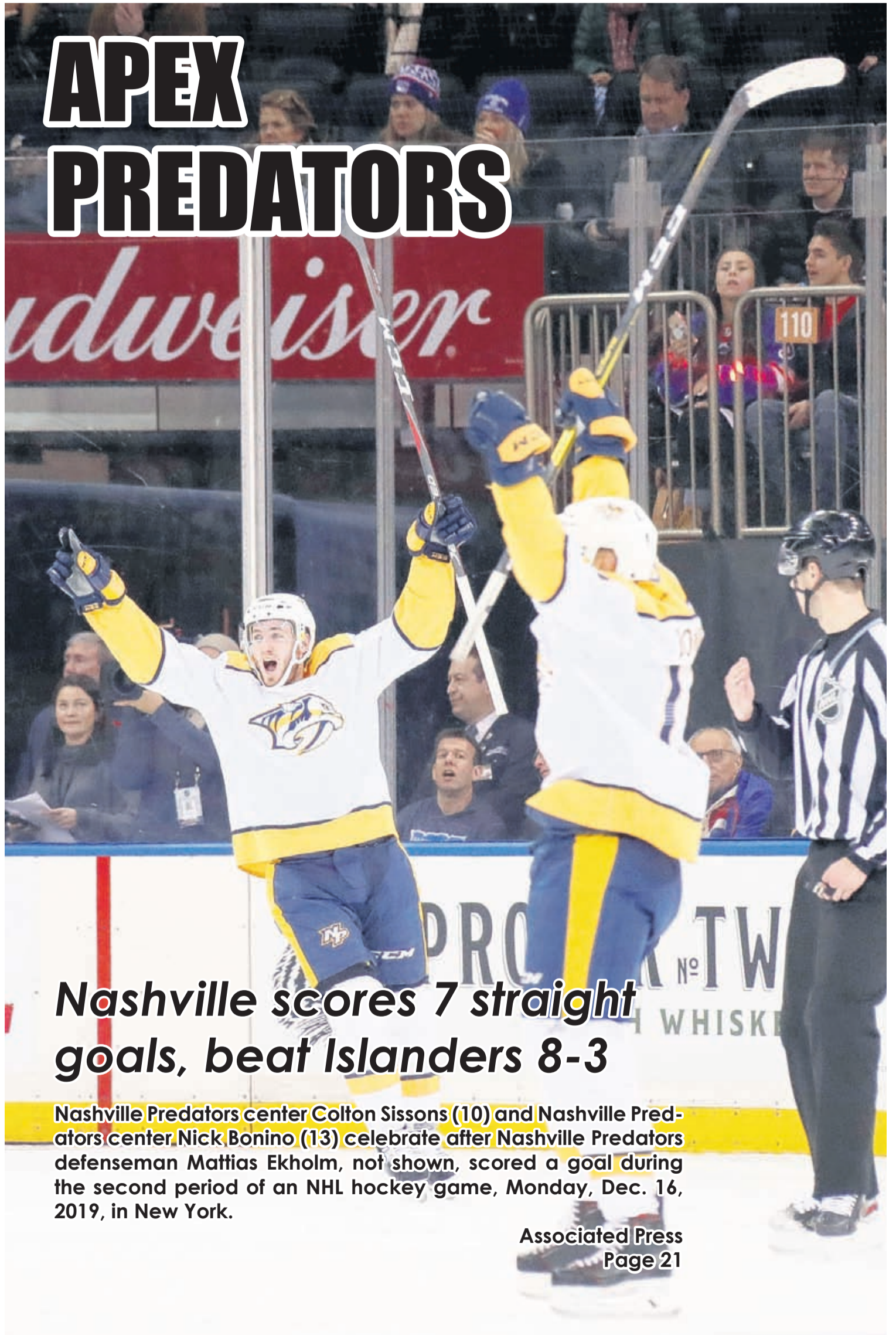
## Pacers end Lakers' road winning streak at 14 games, 105-102

**By The Associated Press**  
**INDIANAPOLIS (AP)** — Domantas Sabonis scored 26 points and Malcolm Brogdon made a tiebreaking reverse layup with 36.4 seconds left Tuesday night to give the Indiana Pacers a 105-102 victory over Los Angeles, snapping the Lakers' 14-game road winning streak.

Brogdon dribbled past Dwight Howard and then used the rim to protect the ball as he made the shot. Sabonis followed by hitting one of two free throws with 10.7 seconds remaining.

LeBron James had 20 points, nine rebounds and nine assists but missed a 3-pointer that would have given the Lakers the lead with 11.7 seconds to go. Los Angeles also missed two shots on its final possession while trying to force overtime.

Continued on Page 22



# APEX PREDATORS

## Nashville scores 7 straight goals, beat Islanders 8-3

Nashville Predators center Colton Sissons (10) and Nashville Predators center Nick Bonino (13) celebrate after Nashville Predators defenseman Mattias Ekholm, not shown, scored a goal during the second period of an NHL hockey game, Monday, Dec. 16, 2019, in New York.

Associated Press  
 Page 21

## Bullseye: Female darts player breaks down gender barrier

By **STEVE DOUGLAS**  
AP Sports Writer

The widely held image of professional darts on television screens as a beer-fuelled pub game typically played by out-of-shape men has been shattered by the barrier-breaking exploits of a young Englishwoman.

Amid raucous scenes at London's atmospheric Alexandra Palace, Fallon Sherrock became an unlikely overnight celebrity in Britain when she landed a double 18 to clinch victory over a male opponent at the sport's flagship event, the PDC World Championship, on Tuesday.

It was a first win by a woman on darts' highest stage, one that trended on Twitter and has catapulted the 25-year-old Sherrock into a life she could never have imagined.

Wednesday morning saw her appear on some of the biggest TV and radio shows in Britain. Much to her delight and surprise, she now has a blue tick next to her name on her Twitter account. The biggest payday of her career - by a long way - awaits her at the weekend.

Bigger than all that, she is now a trailblazer in the game.

"It definitely sends out a

good statement," Sherrock said. "We can beat the men."

And how her win was celebrated. After hitting the winning double to claim a 3-2 victory over Ted Everts, she skipped to the board to collect her darts and turned around to see a room of mostly inebriated men bouncing up and down and singing in celebration.

"We love you Fallon, we do," they chanted, over and over again.

She shook hands with Everts, who then applauded Sherrock and extended his right arm out as if to urge spectators to acclaim Sherrock, a one-time professional hairdresser who first picked up a dart when she was aged 17.

"I've always had the game," she said Wednesday, "but us women have never had the opportunity to prove it." Until last year, that is. That was when the man that runs top-level darts, promoter Barry Hearn, allocated two of the 96 places in the world championship field to women. Previously, women could attempt to qualify for the event but now spots were guaranteed.

On Monday, Mikuru Suzuki - the women's world champion - took James Richard-



Fallon Sherrock and Ted Everts in action at the PDC Darts World Championship at Alexandra Palace, London, Tuesday Dec. 17, 2019.

Associated Press

son to a sudden-death leg in the fifth set before losing. Before that, Gayl King of Canada (2000), Anastasia Dobromyslova of Russia (2009, 2018) and Lisa Ashton of England (2018) had played in the main draw, all losing in the first round.

Sherrock went one better, setting up a second-round match against Mensur Suljovic, the 11th seed from Austria, where she is guaranteed to win at least 15,000 pounds (nearly \$20,000) even if she loses.

It is a triumph of persistence for Sherrock, who developed a serious kidney condition after giving birth to her son, Rory, five years ago. She had to take medication and one of the side-effects was the swelling of her face, which led to her receiving abuse online for

her appearance.

That, plus what she described as "constant sexist comments" about trying to make her way as a darts player, "inspired me to get better and prove everyone wrong," Sherrock told the BBC.

"Well, I have just proved them wrong," she said.

It should deliver a huge fillip to the women's game. The male-dominated sport is slowly starting to embrace females, with Daniela Bata-Bogdanov of Hungary becoming the first ever female scoring official at this event. She was scoring the Sherrock-Everts match on Tuesday.

Leading women's darts player Laura Turner is one of the commentators at the world championship.

And last year, officials took

the decision to stop having walk-on girls lead players to the oche before matches at darts events "following feedback from host broadcasters." The Formula One racing series has dispensed with the long-standing tradition of having women on the grid - known as "Grid Girls" - before races, considering it inappropriate and outdated.

Unlike other sports where physicality is crucial, darts is about hand-eye coordination. So it might just be the cultural and social environment that has prevented women from making names for themselves in a game that has a cult following in Britain, and is also popular in the Netherlands and Germany among other countries as Hearn sends darts to new markets. □



Canada's Meghan Agosta (2) and United States' Cayla Barnes (3) battle for the puck during the second period of a rivalry series women's hockey game in Hartford, Conn., Saturday, Dec. 14, 2019.

Associated Press

## U.S. women get 2 early goals, go ahead 2-0 in Canada series

**MONCTON, New Brunswick (AP)** — Abby Roque and Alex Carpenter scored early goals, and the United States women's hockey team held on to beat Canada 2-1 in the second game of their five-game Rivalry Series.

Roque found the net 2:43 into the first period on the Americans' first shot on goal — beating Canadian goaltender Ann-Renee Desbiens stick-side. Carpenter extended the lead at 14:09 of the first. She

got a quick pass from Kelly Pannek through the crease and easily found the back of the net.

Canada got on the scoreboard midway through a chippy second period when Ann-Sophie Bettez deflected the puck past American goaltender Aerin Frankel.

"The second period, I thought we got a little momentum. We got the goal and the game started to change," Canada coach Perry Pearn said. "Certainly

I thought we controlled the third period. But you've got to be so careful against the Americans. You can't give them odd-man rushes and we did too much of that tonight."

The U.S. captured the series opener 4-1 on Saturday in Hartford, Connecticut.

USA Hockey and Hockey Canada established the Rivalry Series last season to further showcase the women's national teams. Canada won the inaugural series, 2-1. □

## Ravens, Saints, Seahawks are top 3 teams in AP Pro32 poll



Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson (8) scrambles for yardage against the New York Jets during the first half of an NFL football game, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2019, in Baltimore.

Associated Press

By **SIMMI BUTTAR**  
AP Pro Football Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Lamar Jackson and the Baltimore Ravens have scored a perfect 10.

Led by their star quarterback, the Ravens extended their winning streak to 10 games and wrapped up the AFC North with a rout of the New York Jets last week.

With another win, the Ravens will clinch a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs.

And the NFL's top team is once again the unanimous choice as the top team in the latest AP Pro32 poll. For the third consecutive week, the Ravens earned all 12 first-place votes for 384 points in balloting Tuesday by media members who regularly cover the NFL.

"No stopping Lamar Jackson," Fox Sports' John Czarnecki said.

The New Orleans Saints moved up one spot to No. 2 after their dominating 34-7 win over the Indianapolis Colts on Monday night. Drew Brees became the NFL's all-time leader in touchdown passes, throwing for four scores. He completed 29 of 30 passes — 96.7 percent — for 307 yards before being relieved by Teddy Bridgewater

in the fourth quarter.

"Drew Brees breaks Peyton Manning's career touchdowns record with yet another dominant performance," said Newsday's Bob Glauber. "Ten years after the Saints' Super Bowl run, Brees looks ready to do it again."

The Seattle Seahawks also moved up one place to No. 3 after topping Carolina. And the San Francisco 49ers slipped two spots to No. 4 after their 29-22 loss to the Atlanta Falcons.

The NFC West rivals are tied at 11-3.

The 49ers host the Los Angeles Rams on Saturday night and the Seahawks host the Arizona Cardinals on Sunday.

The Seahawks host the 49ers in Week 17 to close out the regular season.

"The Seahawks rebounded nicely after being drubbed by the Rams, but the real test comes in the season finale against the 49ers," said Ira Kaufman of Fox 13 in Tampa, Florida.

And the Kansas City Chiefs slipped a spot to No. 5 despite their 23-3 rout of the Denver Broncos at snowy Arrowhead Stadium.

The next four teams in the poll all kept their places from last week after wins: the Green Bay Packers at 6, the New England Patriots at 7, the Minnesota Vikings

at 8, and the Buffalo Bills at 9.

The Bills head to Foxborough, Massachusetts, on Saturday to face the Patriots, who are trying to clinch the AFC East title for the 11th consecutive year.

And the Packers head to Minnesota for the final Monday night game of the season and can wrap up the NFC North with a win.

The Houston Texans moved up one spot to round out the top 10 after edging the

Tennessee Titans 24-21. The Texans open Week 16 as they head to Tampa Bay to face the Buccaneers on Saturday afternoon. A win would give them their fourth division title in six years. □

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Bertram "Driftwood" or on their more spacious 37ft twin engine Bertram called "Living Easy". Both yachts are available for charters from 8am to 12 noon, or from 1 to 5pm (6-hour trips also available). To book a fishing charter visit [www.driftwoodfishingcharters.com](http://www.driftwoodfishingcharters.com) or call Herbert direct at (297)-5924040.



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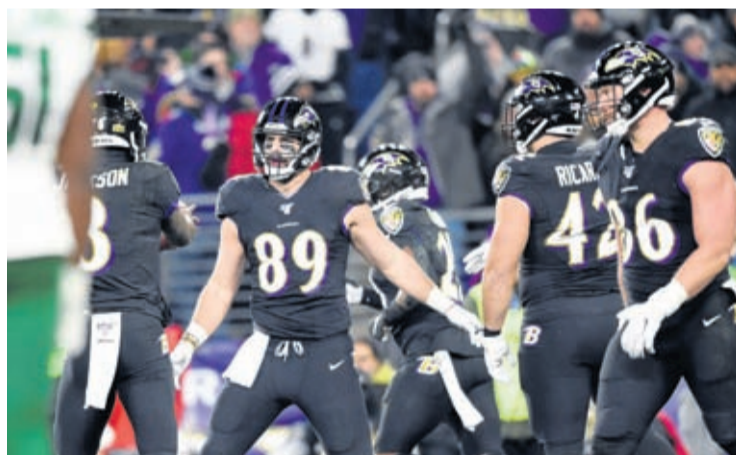
Oranjestad- Renaissance Marina Downtown is home to the Driftwood Fishing Charters, the successful fishermen of the established seafood restaurant Driftwood. Herby senior and Herby Junior both share a passion and love for fishing. They know what the local waters have to offer and what fresh fish really means. Over 30 years ago, the idea for the fishing charter was born.



## Baltimore Ravens tie Pro Bowl record with 12 selections

By The Associated Press

Twelve Baltimore Ravens, including second-year quarterback Lamar Jackson, and seven New Orleans Saints, highlighted by league-leading receiver Michael Thomas, have made the Pro Bowl. Baltimore tied the record for Pro Bowl players set by Miami in 1973. The NFL released the rosters Tuesday night for the game in Orlando, Florida, on Jan. 26. Joining Jackson from the Ravens, who at 12-2 have the league's best record, are tight end Mark Andrews, long snapper Morgan Cox, cornerbacks Marcus Peters and Marlon Humphrey, running back Mark Ingram, linebacker Matthew Judon, fullback Patrick Ricard, tackle Ronnie Stanley, safety Earl Thomas, kicker Justin Tucker, and guard Marshal Yanda. "This honor is all about my teammates and our coaches, because without



**Baltimore Ravens tight end Mark Andrews (89) celebrates with quarterback Lamar Jackson (8) after they connected for a touchdown pass during the first half of an NFL football game against the New York Jets, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2019, in Baltimore. Associated Press**

them, the success we've had as a team wouldn't be possible," Jackson said. "I'm also grateful for all the fans who continue to support us and who have helped make this season so special. Ultimately, it's about winning, and we still have a lot of work to do before we accomplish our biggest goals." Thirty teams had at least

one player selected and 24 clubs had multiple players chosen. The New York Giants and Miami Dolphins failed to get any Pro Bowlers. Players on the two Super Bowl teams will withdraw from the Pro Bowl and be replaced. Twenty-five of the players selected made it for the first time, including three rookies: San Francisco de-

fensive end Nick Bosa, Kansas City return specialist Mecole Hardman and New Orleans return specialist Deonte Harris. The Pro Bowl coaching staffs will be from the losing teams in the AFC and NFC divisional playoffs with the best regular-season records. Other AFC quarterbacks are Patrick Mahomes of Kansas City and Deshaun Watson of Houston. The NFC QBs are Drew Brees of New Orleans, Aaron Rodgers of Green Bay and Russell Wilson of Seattle. Perhaps the most star-studded spot on offense is tight end with San Francisco's George Kittle, Philadelphia's Zach Ertz, Kansas City's Travis Kelce and Baltimore's Andrews. Defensive standouts include Buffalo's Tre'Davious White, who is tied for the league lead with New England's Stephon Gilmore with six interceptions. They are the top AFC cornerbacks.

NFL sacks leader Shaquil Barrett of Tampa Bay is on the NFC squad, along with perennial Pro Bowlers Aaron Donald of the Rams and Richard Sherman of the 49ers. "To make the Pro Bowl, it's a dream come true," Barrett said. "That's the best way I can sum it up. I dreamed of this growing up. It's a huge honor and I can only hope that I'll have more to follow." Two other Buccaneers, wide receivers Mike Evans and Chris Godwin, were chosen. "This is a special moment, and while I've worked hard to get to where I am in my career, I wouldn't have been able to do this without my teammates and coaches," Godwin said. "I've had the chance to play alongside some of the best in the NFL, including Mike Evans, and sharing the honor with Mike makes it even better. I'm extremely grateful for this opportunity." □

# Kopitar scores in OT to rally Kings past Bruins 4-3

By The Associated Press

**BOSTON (AP)** — Anze Kopitar scored at 3:23 of overtime and the Los Angeles Kings rallied to beat the Boston Bruins 4-3 on Tuesday night.

Kopitar beat Tuukka Rask with a high wrist shot after Jonathan Quick had come up with a huge save at the other end, giving the Kings their fourth win in five games and extending their best stretch of the season (4-0-1).

Blake Lizotte had a goal and an assist for the Kings, who couldn't hold on to leads of 1-0 and 2-1 before rallying for a thrilling finish. Down 3-2 late in the third, the Kings pulled Quick for an extra skater and tied it on Matt Roy's slap shot with 2:01 left in regulation.

Adrian Kempe also scored for Los Angeles and Quick finished with 37 saves.

Danton Heinen had a goal and assist, and Patrice Bergeron and Brandon Carlo also scored for Boston, which fell to 1-5-1 in its last seven and has lost two straight at home. Rask had 23 saves.

## LIGHTNING 4, SENATORS 3, OT

**TAMPA, Fla. (AP)** — Anthony Cirelli scored with 12.7 seconds left in overtime to lift Tampa Bay past Ottawa. Cirelli split two defenders near the blue line and lifted a shot past Marcus Hogberg.

Tampa Bay also got goals from Nikita Kucherov, Cedric Paquette and Brayden Point, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 25 saves.

Mark Borowiecki, Connor Brown and Anthony Duclair scored for the Senators. Hogberg, playing in his third game this season and seventh overall, stopped 36 shots.

## MAPLE LEAFS 5, SABRES 3

**TORONTO (AP)** — Auston Matthews scored twice and Toronto held on to beat Buffalo.

Frederik Gauthier had a goal and an assist, and Dmytro Timashov and Ilya Mikheyev also scored for the Maple Leafs. Frederik Andersen stopped 27 shots and Tyson Barrie had two assists.



Los Angeles Kings center Anze Kopitar (11) is congratulated by teammates after his game-winning goal off Boston Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask during an overtime period of an NHL hockey game in Boston, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019. The Kings won 4-3.

Associated Press

Matthews became the second player in franchise history to score at least 20 goals in each of his first four NHL seasons, joining Dave Keon, who did it in six straight from 1960-66.

Rasmus Dahlin and Jack Eichel had a goal and an assist each, and Kyle Okposo scored for Buffalo. Victor Olofsson added two assists, and Linus Ullmark finished with 28 saves for the Sabres.

## PREDATORS 8, ISLANDERS 3 UNIONDALE, N.Y. (AP)

— Nick Bonino had the tie-breaking goal late in the second period as Nashville got seven consecutive scores to rally for its second win in two nights.

Craig Smith had two goals and an assist, Filip Forsberg, Calle Jarnkrok, Roman Josi and Ryan Johansen each had a goal and an assist, and Rocco Grimaldi also scored to help the Predators win for the fourth time in six games. Pekka Rinne stopped 27 shots.

Brock Nelson, Derrick Brassard and Casey Cizikas scored in a 5:16 span of the second period to give the Islanders a 3-1 lead. However, it was all Predators after that. Thomas Greiss gave up five goals on 15 shots through two periods, and Semyon Varlamov stopped six of the nine shots he faced in the third.

## FLYERS 4, DUCKS 1

**PHILADELPHIA (AP)** — The

Philadelphia Flyers honored cancer-stricken teammate Oskar Lindblom and beat Anaheim behind goals by Claude Giroux, David Kase and Jake Voracek.

The Flyers played their first home game since Lindblom was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma, a cancerous tumor that grows in the bones or in the tissue around bones. The 23-year-old from Sweden, who is out for the season, stopped by the locker room during morning skate and visited his teammates.

The Flyers warmed up in purple "Hockey Fights Cancer" jerseys and will auction them off with proceeds going to Ewing's sarcoma research. They left "I Fight For Oskar" signs on every seat, and fans held them during a tribute video for Lindblom. Ducks and Flyers players tapped their sticks and fans stood and applauded the promising forward who had 11 goals and 18 points in 30 games this season. Philadelphia sold #OskarStrong purple shirts, and proceeds from the 50/50 raffle were donated toward Ewing's sarcoma research.

Rickard Rakell made it 2-1 in the second with his 10th goal for Anaheim. John Gibson finished with 27 saves.

## BLUE JACKETS 5, RED WINGS 3

**DETROIT (AP)** — Pierre-Luc Dubois scored early in the third period and Gustav Nyquist added an empty-netter in the closing seconds, helping Columbus win its second straight.

Cam Atkinson and Oliver Bjorkstrand had goals 1:04 apart to put Columbus ahead midway through the first, and Kevin Stenlund tied it 3-3 midway through the second with his first NHL goal. Joonas Korpi also finished with 18 saves.

Adam Erne scored twice and Tyler Bertuzzi also scored for Detroit, and Jonathan Bernier stopped 34 shots. The Red Wings have lost 14 of their last 16 games.

## HURRICANES 6, JETS 3

**WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP)** — Sebastian Aho and Jordan Staal each scored twice, Andrei Svechnikov added his second lacrosse-style goal of the season, and Carolina extended its point streak to 5-0-1.

Lucas Wallmark also scored for Carolina, Dougie Hamilton contributed three assists, and Nino Niederreiter added two. Petr Mrazek made 30 saves for the Hurricanes, who are 3-0-1 during a five-game trip that ends Thursday in Colorado. Jack Roslovic, Patrik Laine and Mark Scheifele scored for the Jets, who had won five straight at home. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 18

shots for Winnipeg before Laurent Brossoit replaced him to start the third period with Carolina ahead 5-2. Brossoit made four saves.

## PENGUINS 4, FLAMES 1

**CALGARY, Alberta (AP)** — Evgeni Malkin scored his 400th goal as Pittsburgh beat Calgary.

The Russian joined Mario Lemieux (690), Sidney Crosby (451) and Jaromir Jagr (439) as the only players in franchise history to reach 400 goals.

Bryan Rust and John Marino also scored for the Penguins in a third straight win to open a three-game swing through Alberta and British Columbia. Tristan Jarry made 33 saves for his fifth win in six starts.

Johnny Gaudreau scored for the Flames, who have lost back-to-back games following a seven-game winning streak. Cam Talbot stopped 29 shots in his ninth start this season (3-6-0).

## GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3, WILD 2

**LAS VEGAS (AP)** — Tomas Nosek scored his first goal in nearly a month, Marc-Andre Fleury made 24 saves and Vegas beat Minnesota in regulation for the first time.

Chandler Stephenson and Shea Theodore also scored for the Golden Knights, who were facing the Wild for the seventh time since joining the league in 2017. It also marked the first time Vegas won three straight at home this season.

Mats Zuccarello and Zach Parise scored for the Wild, and Alex Stalock made 26 saves.

## CANADIENS 3, CANUCKS 1

**VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP)** — Tomas Tatar and Shea Weber scored power-play goals 1:34 apart in the third period to lift Montreal.

Nick Cousins also scored to help the Canadiens win for the fourth time in five games. Max Domi and Joel Armia had two assists each, and Carey Price stopped 38 shots.

Adam Gaudette scored and Jacob Markstrom finished with 27 saves for the Canucks, who lost their third straight game and fourth in five. □

# Former Bellator welterweight champ MacDonald signs with PFL

By **DAN GELSTON**  
AP Sports Writer

Rory MacDonald stood inside an MMA cage and questioned his drive to continue to hurt people in a professional fight.

MacDonald would find the conviction to keep fighting — and he found a new promotion to continue his career. MacDonald, the former Bellator welterweight champion, signed a multi-year deal with Professional Fighters League and will debut with the company in 2020. The 30-year-old MacDonald spent six years with UFC — beating Nate Diaz, B.J. Penn and Tyron Woodley along the way — and spent the last 2½ years with Bellator. MacDonald (21-6-1) beat Douglas Lima to win the welterweight title in January 2018 and lost the rematch in his final fight for the company in October. He became a free agent



In this July 11, 2015, file photo, Rory MacDonald, right, fights Robbie Lawler during a welterweight mixed martial arts title bout at UFC 189 in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

and was courted by PFL, the MMA company that has a regular-season format and a championship night that awards a \$1 million prize to the winner in each weight class.

"They have big goals to grow in the sport," MacDonald said Wednesday by

phone. "They made me an offer that is very motivating to perform well. I'm not a big talker. I go in there and I fight hard. The way they have things set up is performance based and I think that's what suits me."

MacDonald made waves in MMA in April after he

fought Jon Fitch to a draw, and suffered a crisis of conscience about continuing in the sport.

"It takes a certain spirit to come in here and put a man through pain," he said in the post-fight interview. "I don't know if I have that same drive to hurt people anymore. I don't know what it is. It's confusing, but I know the Lord has something in store for me."

MacDonald fought two more times this year for Bellator, which declined to match his contract offer, and said he wouldn't have signed with PFL if he had any lingering doubts about his commitment to fighting. "The fact that I was a free agent, if I was ready to hang it up, it would be a time like that," MacDonald said. "I wouldn't go ahead and try and sign a new contract if I was iffy about my career. I'm crystal clear

moving forward that I have a lot more years ahead of me in the sport."

He is scheduled to attend the PFL Championship on Dec. 31 at the Hulu Theater at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Ray Cooper III fights David Michaud for the welterweight title and the \$1 million prize. MacDonald could debut in the division as early as May 2020 when the next PFL season opens.

"Rory MacDonald is a champion, world-class fighter and MMA star," said Peter Murray, CEO of the Professional Fighters League.

"Rory is a game-changer for the PFL and this signing illustrates our commitment to not only develop great fighters in our league, but to also attract and sign the best MMA fighters who want to control their own destiny." □

## NBA

Continued from Page 17

The Lakers looked as though they had taken control with a 9-0 run for a 95-91 lead midway through the fourth quarter. But Indiana responded just as it had all night as the Lakers played without All-Star forward Anthony Davis.

Howard had a season-high 20 points.

**CLIPPERS 120, SUNS 99**

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Paul George scored 24 points, Kawhi Leonard added 20 and Los Angeles returned home after two weeks away to beat Phoenix.

Leonard and George teamed up in a dominant third quarter that saw the Clippers stretch their lead from five points to 21 by the time it was over. The two superstars combined to score 18 points in a 32-16 run that sent Los Angeles into the fourth leading 90-69.

Lou Williams added 20 points for the Clippers, scoring their first 11 of the fourth — including three 3-pointers. Ivica Zubac

had 12 points in helping the team win its 12th in a row over the Suns in Los Angeles.

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 19 points and Deandre Ayton added 18 points and 12 rebounds in his return from a 25-game NBA suspension for Phoenix, which lost its fourth in a row.

**NETS 108, PELICANS 101, OT**

**NEW ORLEANS (AP)** — Spencer Dinwiddie scored 31 points and Brooklyn extended New Orleans' franchise-worst losing streak to 13 games.

Joe Harris had 24 points, including a jumper that put the Nets ahead 104-98 with 1:28 to go in the extra period. Brandon Ingram quickly responded with a 3-pointer, but the Pelicans, who shot 34%, got no closer.

The Nets have won five of seven.

Ingram had 22 points and 10 rebounds but missed 10 of his first 11 shots before scoring all but two of his points after halftime. Jrue Holiday scored 21 for the Pelicans, who missed 29 of



Brooklyn Nets center DeAndre Jordan (6) blocks a shot by New Orleans Pelicans guard Josh Hart in the second half of an NBA basketball game in New Orleans, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019. The Nets won in overtime 108-101.

Associated Press

40 attempts from 3-point range.

Jarrett Allen had 12 points, 14 rebounds and six blocks for the Nets, including a transition dunk to tie the game at 93 in the final minute of regulation.

**HORNETS 110, KINGS 102**

**CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)** — Malik Monk scored 14 of his season-high 23 points in the fourth quarter, and Charlotte spoiled De'Aaron Fox's return from injury with a win over Sacramento.

Cody Zeller had 17 points and nine rebounds, and Bismack Biyombo added 10 points and 12 rebounds

as the Hornets (13-17) won for the fourth time in five games.

Fox was back on the floor after missing 17 games with left ankle sprain and led the Kings (12-15) with 19 points in 30 minutes.

Monk scored eight straight points in the fourth quarter, including a pair of 3s. He went 5 of 5 from the field in the fourth and finished with a career-high 10 rebounds.

**JAZZ 109, MAGIC 102**

**SALT LAKE CITY (AP)** — Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points, including eight as Utah closed the game with a 19-5 run to beat Or-

lando. With the Jazz trailing 97-90, Mitchell awoke a moribund offense and energized the crowd with a highlight-reel dunk in traffic. That sparked the clinching spurt for Utah (16-11), which has won three in a row.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored nine of his 30 points during the late surge, and Joe Ingles had 16 points and 12 rebounds.

D.J. Augustin had 22 points off the bench and Evan Fournier added 19 for the Magic, who fell to 12-15.

**KNICKS 143, HAWKS 120**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Knicks rookie RJ Barrett scored a career-high 27 points as New York ran away from Trae Young and Atlanta.

Mitchell Robinson had a career-best 22 points along with 13 rebounds, and Marcus Morris also scored 22 for the Knicks, who have won three of four after a 10-game losing streak.

Young scored 42 points for the Hawks, who lost their fifth straight. De'Andre Hunter added 19 points.

New York went ahead by 31 on Barrett's three-point play early in the third quarter. □

# Cole on \$324M, 9-year deal with Yankees: 'It was my dream'

By RONALD BLUM  
AP Baseball Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Gerrit Cole brought along a sign for the news conference to announce his signing with the New York Yankees: a crinkled poster board that read "Yankee Fan Today Tomorrow Forever."

Then 11, Cole was caught on camera holding up that placard in the seats at the 2001 World Series in Phoenix, either before Game 6 or 7. The lettering of the tape he used has faded from blue to tan during years on the wall of his room and then in a closet. Cole spurned the Yankees when they drafted him 28th overall in 2008, choosing to enroll at UCLA. He signed with Pittsburgh three years later after he was selected first overall. Now as a free agent, he finally was fitted for pinstripes, agreeing to a record \$324 million, nine-year contract.

"It was my dream. I had a second opportunity to chase it," he said. Cole put on a No. 45 jersey, the number that had belonged to first baseman Luke Voit. The 29-year-old right-hander's beard was newly shorn to comply with



**New York Yankees pitcher Gerrit Cole, center, holds a sign he used as a young Yankees fan, as he is introduced as the baseball club's newest player during a baseball media availability, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019 in New York. He is joined by team owner Hal Steinbrenner, left, and his wife, Amy Cole.**

Associated Press

Yankees team rules. "He cleans up nice, doesn't he?" Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. Cole had been known for a scruffy look. The Yankees' barber went to Cole's hotel room Wednesday morning to apply a shave. "I've experienced razor burn now for the first time," he said.

Among the gifts the Yankees used to recruit Cole were bottles of 2004 and 2005 Masseto, a Tuscan wine of Merlot grapes. Cole couldn't figure out how New York knew it was his favorite until he remembered he had mentioned it once to Lou Cucuzza Jr., the Yankees' director of clubhouse

operations. Cole's deal is the largest for a pitcher in both its total and its average annual value of \$36 million. New York hopes Cole will lead a young corp that includes Aaron Judge, Gary Sánchez and Gleyber Torres to the Yankees' first title since 2009. "We need to win some world championships,"

owner Hal Steinbrenner said. "Plural."

Boone said he was "blown away" by "his passion for what he does, his ability to articulate that passion." New York opened with an eight-year offer and went to a ninth season to differentiate the Yankees from other perceived suitors, the Los Angeles Dodgers and Angels. It appears to be the longest contract for a pitcher since Wayne Garland's \$2.3 million, 10-year deal with Cleveland before the 1977 season.

Cole was 20-5 with an AL-leading 2.50 ERA and a major league-leading 326 strikeouts for Houston last season.

His wife, Amy, the sister of San Francisco shortstop Brandon Crawford, watched the news conference from the dais. New York forfeited its second- and fifth-highest draft picks, roughly No. 62 and No. 164 overall overall. Houston gets an extra pick as compensation, approximately No. 74. To clear a roster spot, the Yankees designated right-hander Chance Adams for assignment. □

## OF Avisail García agrees to \$20M deal with Milwaukee Brewers

By KEITH JENKINS  
AP Sports Writer

**MILWAUKEE (AP)** — Now that the Milwaukee Brewers have added Avisail García to their talented outfield, Ryan Braun could see more time at first base. García's \$20 million, two-year contract was finalized Tuesday, a deal that includes a 2022 club option and could be worth \$30 million over three years.

Braun, who turned 36 last month, is Milwaukee's primary left fielder. The 2011 NL MVP played 18 games at first in 2018 but none this year.

"Ryan's going to see some time at first base," general manager David Stearns said. "He's open to it. He

understands it. We certainly believe he can play over there at a good level, so that will be part of the rotation in 2020 but that will not be his exclusive position." García gets a \$500,000 signing bonus and salaries of \$7 million next year and \$10.5 million in 2021. The Brewers have a \$12 million option for 2020 with a \$2 million buyout, and the option would become mutual if García has 550 plate appearances in 2021 or 1,050 in 2020 and '21 combined. If the option becomes mutual, García would get a buyout if he declines it, the amount depending on plate appearances in 2020 and '21 combined: \$500,000 for 601-800, \$750,000 for

801-900, \$1 million for 901-1,050, \$1.5 million for 1,051-1,250 and \$2 million for more than 1,250.

García batted .282 with a career-high 20 home runs and 72 RBIs for the Tampa Bay Rays last season, spending most of his time in right field. He joins a crowded Milwaukee outfield that includes 2018 NL MVP Christian Yelich, Braun and two-time All-Star Lorenzo Cain.

Milwaukee also agreed to a one-year deal with corner infielder Ryon Healy that pays a \$1 million salary in the major leagues and \$250,000 in the minors, with \$250,000 guaranteed. He could also be an option at first base. The 27-year-old Healy batted



**In this Sept. 8, 2019, file photo, Tampa Bay Rays' Avisail Garcia reacts after hitting a home run against the Toronto Blue Jays during the seventh inning of a baseball game, in St. Petersburg, Fla.**

Associated Press

.237 with seven homers in 47 games last season with the Seattle Mariners.

Healy can earn \$1 million in performance bonuses based on plate appearances: \$100,000 for 250, \$200,000 for 350, \$300,000 for 450 and \$400,000 for 550.

The 28-year-old García played in 125 games with the Rays last season. In five seasons with the White Sox, García hit .271 with 74 home runs and 289 RBIs, including posting career highs in batting average (.330) and RBIs (80) in 2017, when he was an All-Star. □

# Finland offers crash course in artificial intelligence to EU

By **JARI TANNER**  
Associated Press

**HELSINKI (AP)** — Finland is offering a techy Christmas gift to all European Union citizens — a free-of-charge online course in artificial intelligence in their own language, officials said Tuesday.

The tech-savvy Nordic nation, led by the 34-year-old Prime Minister Sanna Marin, is marking the end of its rotating presidency of the EU at the end of the year with a highly ambitious goal. Instead of handing out the usual ties and scarves to EU officials and journalists, the Finnish government has opted to give practical understanding of AI to 1% of EU citizens, or about 5 million people, through a basic online course by the end of 2021.

It is teaming up with the



**Social democrats minister Sanna Marin speaks to the media after she was elected as Prime Minister of Finland, in Helsinki, Finland, on Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2019.**

Associated Press

University of Helsinki, Finland's largest and oldest academic institution, and the Finland-based tech

consultancy Reaktor. Teemu Roos, a University of Helsinki associate professor in the department of computer science, described the nearly \$2 million project as "a civics course in AI" to help EU citizens cope with society's ever-increasing digitalization and the possibilities AI offers in the jobs market.

The course covers elementary AI concepts in a practical way and doesn't go into deeper concepts like coding, he said. "We have enormous potential in Europe but what we lack is investments into AI," Roos said, adding that

the continent faces fierce AI competition from digital giants like China and the United States.

The initiative is paid for by the Finnish ministry for economic affairs and employment, and officials said the course is meant for all EU citizens whatever their age, education or profession. Since its launch in Finland in 2018 "The Elements of AI" has been phenomenally successful — the most popular course ever offered by the University of Helsinki, which traces its roots back to 1640 — with more than 220,000 students from over 110 countries having taken it so far online, Roos said.

A quarter of those enrolled so far are aged 45 and over, and some 40% are women. The share of women is nearly 60% among Finnish participants — a remarkable figure in the male-dominated technology domain.

Together with Reaktor and local EU partners, the university is set to translate it to the remaining 20 of the EU's official languages in the next two years.

Megan Schaible, COO of Reaktor Education, said during the project's presentation in Brussels last week that the company decided to join forces with the Finnish university "to prove that AI should not be left in the hands of a few elite coders." □

## UK watchdog set to challenge Google, Facebook ad dominance



**This Oct. 23, 2019, file photo shows Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg testifying before a House Financial Services Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington.**

Associated Press

By **KELVIN CHAN**  
AP Business Writer

**LONDON (AP)** — Britain's competition watchdog on Wednesday signaled its willingness to push for stricter rules to counter Google and Facebook's dominance of online advertising. The Competition and Markets Authority said in an interim report it's concerned that the U.S. tech giants have become "entrenched" players in the U.K.'s 13 billion pound (\$17 billion) digital advertising market, with "negative consequences"

for the people and businesses that use them. Google's 6 billion pounds in search advertising revenue last year accounted for more than 90% of the U.K. total, while Facebook's 2 billion pounds in display ad revenue was equivalent to almost half the U.K. total. Big doesn't necessarily mean bad and the two companies provide innovative and valuable products and services, the authority added. However, it said a "lack of real competition to

Google and Facebook could mean people are already missing out on the next great new idea from a potential rival." Lack of proper choice for consumers and higher prices for advertises could mean higher costs for flights, electronics, insurance and other online purchases, it said.

"Most of us visit social media sites and search on the internet every day, but how these firms work can be a mystery," the authority's Chief Executive Andrea Coscelli said.

"Digital advertising fuels big businesses like Google and Facebook and we have been building a picture of how this complex new market works," he added. Coscelli said the authority looked at how the big tech platforms collect and use personal data, which lets Google and Facebook more effectively target ads than their rivals. They looked at how the companies monetized this data, and what it means for rivals as well as people and businesses that use their services. □

## Lawsuit: Apple, Microsoft profit from child cobalt miners

By **ASHRAF KHALIL**  
Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — A new lawsuit accuses several of the world's largest technology firms of knowingly profiting from children laboring under brutal conditions in African cobalt mines.

The suit, filed this week in Washington by the non-governmental organization International Rights Advocates, seeks damages from Apple, Dell, Microsoft, Tesla and Alphabet, the parent company of Google. Cobalt is an essential element in the rechargeable

lithium batteries that fuel many electronic devices. The rise of smartphones in the past 20 years has created a large demand for the metal, and the growing popularity of electric cars is expected to further increase demand.

The lawsuit claims the companies are "aiding and abetting the cruel and brutal use of young children" in cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The suit is filed on behalf of 13 anonymous plaintiffs, all families with children who died or suffered serious injury while mining cobalt. □





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## S&amp;P 500 clings to chance for longest win streak since April



In this Dec. 11, 2019, file photo specialist Thomas McArdle, left, and trader Jonathan Corpina, right, work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

By **STAN CHOE**  
Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — A rally for U.S. stocks came closer to fading out on Wednesday, with indexes stalling near their record levels, but the S&P 500 clung to a chance for its longest winning streak in eight months. Stocks have jumped recently on optimism around a "Phase 1" trade deal announced last week between the United States and China, among other factors. But after five straight days of gains, the S&P 500 has less fuel to push higher. FedEx slumped sharply after it cut its profit forecast for its fiscal year and reported weaker quarterly earnings than analysts expected. It cited "weak global economic

conditions" and higher expenses. Cigna, though, jumped after it agreed to sell its group life and disability coverage business for \$6.3 billion. Stock markets overseas were mixed, with most making only modest moves in a relatively quiet day of trading. Treasury yields were steady, and the price of crude oil headed for its first drop in five days. **KEEPING SCORE:** The S&P 500 was virtually flat, as of 10:30 a.m. Eastern time. Roughly as many stocks fell on the New York Stock Exchange as rose. The Dow Jones Industrial Average ticked up 19 points, or 0.1%, to 28,286, and the Nasdaq composite was up 0.1%. The Russell 2000 index of smaller stocks

slipped 0.1%. **YIELDS:** Treasury yields were relatively steady as investors see little threat of runaway inflation or of a Fed that will change course on interest-rate policy. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 1.90% from 1.89% late Tuesday. **DELIVERING SOUR NEWS:** FedEx slumped 9.1% for the biggest loss in the S&P 500 after it reported revenue and earnings for the latest quarter that fell short of analysts' expectations. The company cited pressure on prices, among other factors. FedEx's woes also pulled UPS lower. The stock gave up 1.8% for one of the larger losses in the S&P 500. **SWEETER SCOOPS:** General Mills rose 1.6% after it

reported stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The company behind Haagen-Dazs ice cream and Yoplait yogurt said its sales were flat from a year ago, which was a touch weaker than analysts expected, but it made more in profit from each \$1 in sales than Wall Street forecast.

**HEALTHY RETURNS:** Cigna rose 2.8% after it said it plans to use the \$5.3 billion in after-tax proceeds from the sale of its group life and disability coverage business to buy back its stock and pay down debt. Cigna increased its stock repurchase program by \$3 billion to a total authorization of \$4 billion. □

## UK inflation bolsters view central bank will not cut rates

By **PAN PYLAS**  
Associated Press

**LONDON (AP)** — Inflation in Britain held steady at 1.5% in the year to November, official figures showed Wednesday, reinforcing expectations that the Bank of England will not cut its main interest rate on Thursday. The Office for National Statistics said the largest downward push on the consumer price index came from accommodation services and tobacco, while the largest upward contributions came from food, and recreation and culture. The unchanged reading was slightly higher than expectations for a modest decline to 1.4% and ahead of recent Bank of England predictions. Though inflation remains markedly below target, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee is widely

expected to hold off from cutting its main interest rate on Thursday from 0.75%. Most economists think inflation will start to creep upwards over coming months largely because the U.K. labor market remains tight with record levels of employment, and reduced near-term uncertainty from Brexit. Samuel Tombs, the chief U.K. economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said the central bank will likely remain focused on domestically-generated inflation, which he expects to "strengthen modestly, in response to the tight labour market and likely uptick in GDP growth in the first half of 2020. "We continue to think, therefore, that investors are mistaken currently to be pricing-in a 50% chance that the (central bank) will cut Bank Rate in the first half of next year," he said. □

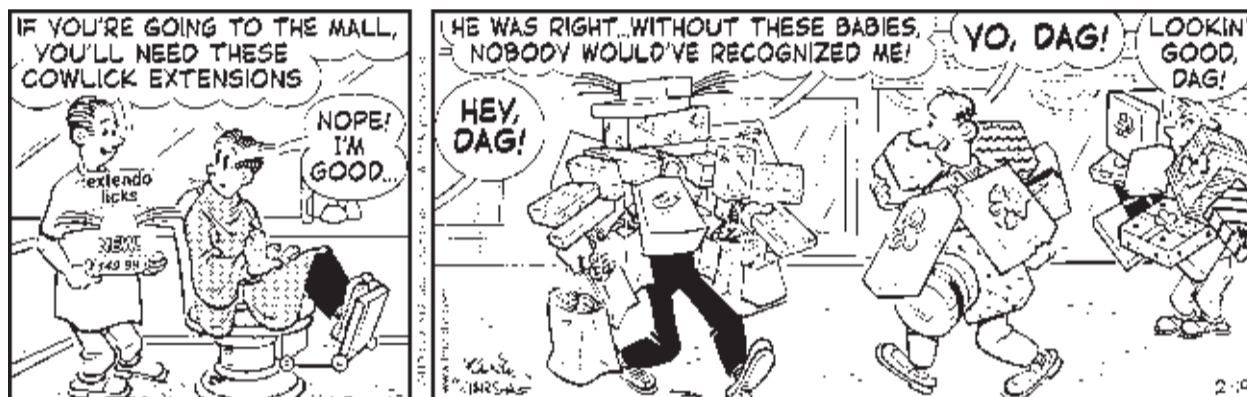
**Mutts**



**6 Chix**



**Blondie**



**Mother Goose & Grimm**



**Baby Blues**



**Zits**



**Conceptis Sudoku**

7	9		4	7				
					3	4	9	
6	2		1	9	5			9
		5		6			1	
6	7	9						
		3		4				5
				3			8	

Difficulty Level ★★★

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

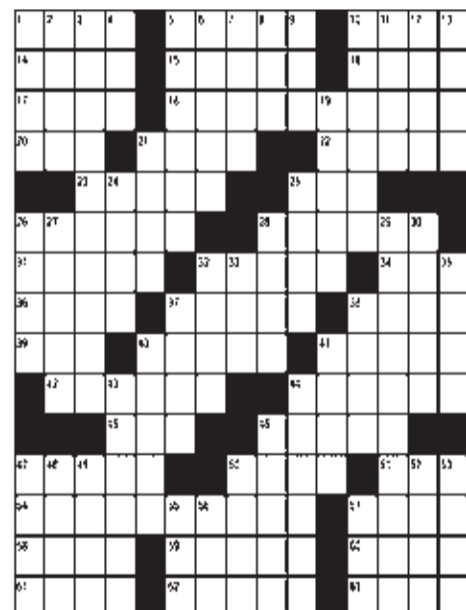
5	9	8	4	3	2	6	7	1
6	7	1	9	5	8	4	2	3
3	2	4	7	1	6	5	9	8
2	3	5	6	9	4	8	1	7
1	8	6	3	2	7	9	5	4
9	4	7	5	8	1	3	6	2
7	5	9	1	4	3	2	8	6
4	6	2	8	7	9	1	3	5
8	1	3	2	6	5	7	4	9

**ACROSS**

- 1. ... for, bought
- 5. Rasca!
- 10. Paid for
- 14. Warty force
- 15. Combreads
- 16. Sioux City's state
- 17. Live a poor excuse
- 18. Bamboozing
- 20. Greek eater
- 21. Rickets & Knots
- 22. Wash of scapsuds
- 23. Robbery
- 25. over-announced
- 26. Fulton J. & Martin
- 28. Dangerous female
- 31. Dative
- 32. Armada
- 34. Drag or carry something heavy
- 36. Ferret
- 37. Co. edge official
- 38. Blender speed
- 39. Deadly viper
- 40. Seashore
- 41. Duplicate
- 42. Red wine
- 44. In need of a haircut
- 45. Argon or xenon
- 46. Vessels open to water below
- 47. Almost too vertical to climb
- 50. Daytime serial
- 51. Deuce
- 54. Tiny radio
- 57. African nation
- 58. Remove from power
- 59. Razz
- 60. on to, kept
- 61. Vastness
- 62. Wise men
- 63. Aggravates

**DOWN**

- 1. Ashen-faced
- 2. Sine: suspect
- 3. Of no consequence
- 4. Hair coloring
- 5. Parades
- 6. Draco's foe
- 7. Picnic scooters
- 8. Kitchen cry
- 9. Fraternal letter
- 10. Sharp, piercing
- 11. Cut of pork
- 12. Possesses
- 13. Salary
- 19. Freshwater fish
- 21. Decade untrue
- 24. Group of cattle
- 25. Meeres
- 26. Puncture
- 27. Weak: say waste
- 28. Can worth little
- 29. En masse as a whole
- 30. Regretful
- 32. Brave deed
- 33. Spanish article
- 35. Zane of Lady Jane
- 37. Mothers of lawns
- 38. Grand: 4-run homer
- 40. Casino game
- 41. Use an axe
- 43. Insurance co. employees
- 44. Pita's
- 46. As sly as a
- 47. Store away
- 48. Word of agreement
- 49. Vane direction
- 50. Male animal
- 52. out: on: desert:
- 53. Chances
- 55. a Small "World"
- 56. Body of water
- 57. Actor: McBride



Created by Jacqueline E. Matthews

**Wednesday's Puzzle Solved**

SHIN	SCAT	ADAM
OILED	HAIR	TAXI
DELTA	ENLIGHTEN	
ASA	MAD	CREASE
DRAGS	KEN	
RAVAGE	BEASTS	
OLIVE	BLURT	HIP
DOSE	LEERY	BETA
SHE	PARTY	RURAL
ADDICT	LINERS	
OLE	COSTA	
SOCCER	HUE	FDR
AVOIDABLE	RATIO	
CELL	TEES	SHEET
KNEE	EAST	ARTS

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# Scientists seeking cause of huge freshwater mussel die-off

By **TRAVIS LOLLER** Associated Press

**KYLES FORD, Tenn. (AP)**

— On a recent late fall afternoon at Kyles Ford, the white branches of sycamore trees overhung the banks of the Clinch River, leaves slowly turning yellow. Green walnuts covered the ground. The shallow water ran fast and cold over the rocky bottom, but it was littered with the white shells of dead mussels.

Freshwater mussels range from about the size of a large button to the size of a billfold, but the work they do for ecosystems is enormous. They can filter around 8-10 gallons of river water each day, cleaning it of algae, silt and even heavy metals and making the whole river a better environment for fish, amphibians, plants and bugs. Mussels also benefit the people who use their rivers as a source of drinking water.

That's why scientists are working quickly to discover the cause of a massive mussel die-off on the Clinch and understand whether it is related to similar die-offs on at least five U.S. rivers and another in Spain.

The Clinch River, winding 300 miles through Appalachia, is home to 133 species of fish and is one of the most important rivers for freshwater mussels in the world, with 46 different species — more than in all of Europe.

"I always try to get people to call this area a temperate Amazon, because the biodiversity here really is off the charts," biologist Jordan Richard, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said recently as he stood in waders, surveying the mussel population at Kyles Ford, a rural community of around 525 near the Virgin-



In this Oct. 17, 2019, photo provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a pile of recently dead freshwater mussels are piled along the shore of the Clinch River near Wallen Bend, Tenn.

Associated Press

ia border. Richard slogged through thigh-deep water in search of pheasantshell mussels, until recently one of the most abundant species on the river. He spots them easily although to the untrained eye, they aren't so obvious. Mussels bury themselves in the riverbed, digging in with their single foot and leaving only a crescent of their shells visible.

In 2016, Richard noticed the pheasantshells were dying in large numbers — the population dropping from 94,000 in 2016 to less than 14,000 this year on a 200-meter (219-yard) stretch. He estimates hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, have died in the larger river.

Richard found reports of similar die-offs over the years in rivers around the world, but he didn't find many answers.

Over the past century, mussel populations everywhere have declined steeply due to pollution, habitat loss

and climate change, yet the current decline looks to be something different.

Richard and a team of scientists suspect an infectious disease. By comparing healthy pheasantshell mussels with dying ones, the team is narrowing down a list of suspected pathogens.

"All living things are chock-full of microorganisms, and we don't have any sort of map for what is healthy inside a mussel," Richard said. University of Wisconsin epidemiologist Tony Goldberg is helping with the investigation.

He specializes in wildlife diseases of unknown cause

— and recently he's been busy.

"Along with invasive species, we're seeing invasive pathogens," Goldberg said. "Often it's the coup de grace for a species that is holding on by a thread."

Disease is a big part of the global extinction crisis, he said. For example, white nose syndrome was first discovered in a single New York cave in 2007 and has since killed millions of bats, and chytrid fungus is responsible for the demise of tree frogs and about 200 other amphibian species worldwide.

But Goldberg is hopeful the freshwater mussel team, which includes scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey and a nonprofit conservation group, will be able to find the cause of the mussel die-offs and a way to stop them.

"I see it as a race against time, not an impossible task," Goldberg said. "We're all motivated by the sinking realization that if we lose these mussels, the rivers we all love are never going to be the same." □

## U.S. permits sale of cigarettes with 95% less nicotine



This Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2019 photo shows a group of cigarettes in New York.

Associated Press

By **MATTHEW PERRONE**

AP Health Writer

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — U.S. health officials on Tuesday endorsed a type of cigarette that could help ease the addictive grip of smoking by delivering very low levels of nicotine.

The Food and Drug Administration will allow 22nd Century Group to begin selling the first low-nicotine cigarettes reviewed by federal health regulators. The products contain roughly 95% less nicotine than standard cigarettes, according to the FDA.

Nicotine, which occurs naturally in tobacco plants, is the addictive chemical that makes cigarettes, chew and related products so hard to quit. Past efforts to sell similar low-nicotine products have fallen flat.

Regulators stressed that their ruling does not mean the new products are safer than regular cigarettes. The agency noted there are no safe tobacco products. Cigarettes cause cancer, lung disease, stroke and a number of other deadly diseases.

But the agency's tobacco chief, Mitch Zeller, noted in a statement that 22nd Century Group's products are the first cigarettes to show the potential "to help reduce nicotine dependence among addicted smokers." The U.S. smoking rate has fallen to an all-time low of 14% of adults, or roughly 34 million Americans. But smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S., responsible for some 480,000 deaths annually.

Low-nicotine cigarettes are not a new idea. Philip Morris experimented with selling a line of them in the U.S. in the late 1980s, without much success. Since then, most low-nicotine cigarettes have been used for research purposes to study addiction in smokers. □

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## Breakthrough Entertainer: Ferreira's 2019 has been surreal



In this Dec. 9, 2019, photo Barbie Ferreira poses for a portrait in Los Angeles. Ferreira was named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2019.

Associated Press

By **MICHAEL CIDONI LENNOX**  
Associated Press

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Barbie Ferreira has been hearing countless variations on the word "breakthrough" applied to her role in HBO's groundbreaking teen drama "Euphoria" ever since the series debuted over the summer. But the actress clearly isn't tired of them.

When Ferreira was asked when it meant to be named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2019, she explained that it, and all of the praise she's received since "Euphoria," has validated a dream she's had since age 10: To be a professional actor.

"It's been a lot of 'No's, a lot of rejection," Ferreira said. "But somehow, some way, it has happened. And I have a role on a TV show, and I have this opportunity and it just feels really surreal." Though "Euphoria's" star id Zendaya, Ferreira has stood out of the daringly dark and often sexually graphic series by portraying Kat Hernandez, a teen working her ways through sexuality and finding her place as a plus-size woman in a size-zero world.

While this is Ferreira's star-making acting role, she is no stranger to success: She was a fashion model in New York who received attention for embracing her fuller size. At 19, Time featured her in a profile and noted "her image inspires girls around the world."

But she gave it all up and moved to Los Angeles to make her Hollywood dream come true.

Ferreira noted that she lucked out in two ways. It's rare that a relative novice lands a plum role on a major TV series. And it's an even longer shot that the series ends up an out-of-the-gate critical and audience hit.

"You know, I saw how great it was and I had my inclinations to be like, 'I think the world's ready to see it,'" Ferreira replied. "By the same time, I remember all of us just so scared for weeks -- and not scared, but more just nervous. And we know that we were putting something out there that maybe was shocking and maybe did things that other people didn't do. And that comes with a lot of anxiety. And, for me, I think the takeaway that I've had is that anything is possible within this career." Ferreira next appears opposite Haley Lu Richardson in the feature adaptation of the novel "Unpregnant," and HBO renewed "Euphoria" for a second season. Down the road, Ferreira would like to tell her own stories.

"I used to think that I would have to wait, like, 10 years...or have to go through all this stuff to be able to have a voice or a story to tell," she said. "And it's just not true. So, I just want to explore all aspects of it."

However, for now, she's savoring every moment, and every sweet word. Today, "breakthrough" suits her just fine. "It has been such a blessing and a privilege to do it that now, I'm like, 'The world is my oyster.' And this was my goal for so long that I've achieved it.

"Now I'm like, 'What else?'" □



This Nov. 30, 2018, file photo shows screenwriter and playwright Aaron Sorkin in New York to promote his latest stage project, an adaptation of "To Kill a Mockingbird."

Associated Press

## Play 'To Kill a Mockingbird' flies to Madison Square Garden

By **MARK KENNEDY**  
Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — The hit play "To Kill a Mockingbird" is busting out of Broadway — and dunking at Madison Square Garden.

For one night only in February, the stage adaptation of Harper Lee's iconic book will be performed exclusively for 18,000 public school children free of charge at the home of the New York Knicks and Rangers, The Associated Press has learned.

The move marks the first time a Broadway play has been performed at the venue nicknamed "The World's Most Famous Arena," which has hosted concerts by the Beatles and Billy Joel, boxing bouts between Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali and "The Concert for Bangladesh" in 1971.

The play's usual Broadway home is the 1,435-seat Shubert Theatre, where it is routinely sold out and commands an average ticket price of \$162.

But on Feb. 26, thousands of middle and high school students from all five boroughs will get to see it for free, courtesy of the Scott Rudin-led production and James L. Dolan, the executive chairman and CEO of The Madison Square Garden Company. The

tickets are being distributed by the city's education department.

The entire current Broadway cast will be present, led by Ed Harris as Atticus Finch. Harris told The AP he was thrilled by the prospect, especially with such a powerful play.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and has been widely praised as a sensitive portrait of racial tension in 1930s Alabama. Finch is a lawyer called upon to defend a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman.

The stage adaptation is directed by Bartlett Sher and written by Aaron Sorkin. Sorkin's other plays include "A Few Good Men" and "The Farnsworth Invention." He won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe Award for his screenplay for "The Social Network." His films include "Steve Jobs" and "Moneyball."

"This is a one-of-a-kind event — 18,000 young people who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford to see a Broadway play are going to be introduced to American theater," Sorkin said. "Scott, Bart and our cast, Jim Dolan and Madison Square Garden and the Department of Education are bringing the mountain to Mohammed — and I'm very excited to be a part of it." □

# 'Rise of Skywalker' is a sour end to a grand saga

By **JAKE COYLE**

**Associated Press**

Not much has caused a disturbance in the "Star Wars" galaxy quite like Rian Johnson's "The Last Jedi," an erratic but electric movie that, regardless of how you felt about it, was something worth arguing about. The same can't be said for J. J. Abrams' "Rise of Skywalker," a scattershot, impatiently paced, fan-servicing finale that repurposes so

much of what came before that it feels as though someone searching for the hyperspace button accidentally pressed the spin cycle instead. A laundry list of plot points cluster like an asteroid field in "Rise of Skywalker." It's a spirited, hectic and ultimately forgettable conclusion of the Skywalker saga begun 42 years ago by George Lucas. It was also surely a lot to ask for. Abrams, having



This image released by Disney/Lucasfilm shows Daisy Ridley as Rey, left, and Adam Driver as Kylo Ren in a scene from "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker."

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already ably and nimbly resuscitated Lucas' space opera with the far less cluttered "The Force Awakens," was brought back (like seemingly everyone is in "Star Wars," dead or alive) with the task of not only wrapping up a trilogy but repairing the divides stirred up by "The Last Jedi" and stabilizing the franchise's revolving door of directors. Abrams here took over for the jettisoned Colin Trevorrow, who retains a "story by" credit.

More significantly, "The Last Jedi" had to solve the underlying existential crisis in "Star Wars," a franchise in search of a reason beyond nostalgia (and, cough, billions of dollars) for continuing. The film, for sure, tries its damndest to come up with something. It is one busy, hardworking movie. But if anything has been proven by the many attempts to rekindle the magic of the original trilogy, it's that Lucas' cosmic amalgamation of Flash Gordon and Akira Kurosawa isn't so easily refabricated.

As the trilogy's third act, "Rise of Skywalker" takes the general shape of "Return of the Jedi," even resuscitating its villain: Emperor Palpatine (the very spooky Ian McDiarmid, now mostly a shadowy heap of CGI). He was last seen exploding in a Death Star air shaft, thrown to his apparent death by Darth Vader. Yet as "Star Wars," the most forever war there is, marches into its fifth decade, the undying demands of a pop culture phenomenon and corporate revenue gener-

ator has led to some unsettling resurrections.

This third "Star Wars" trilogy began with a plan: the first movie would belong to Han (Harrison Ford), the second to Luke (Mark Hamill) and the third to Leia (Carrie Fisher). Life interfered. Fisher, who along with Ford did more to enliven the original trilogy than any special effect, died of a heart attack in 2016. But she, too, has been brought back for "Rise of the Jedi," via bits and pieces of old footage. For an actress of such live-wire verve, the composite result — a handful of brief lines and gazes — is a hollow non-performance.

Palpatine, residing in a dark Sith lair, essentially sets the table. He summons Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) with an order to "kill the girl" (Daisy Ridley's Rey) and thereby inherit the throne. With the wave of his hand, Palpatine unearths an entire fleet of Star Destroyers. They rise from the depths, a new armada of doom for the First Order.

But this is only a piece of the movie's manic start. Abrams, who penned the screenplay with Chris Terrio ("Argo," "Justice League"), races to catch up with the many characters of the Resistance, among them Leia, Finn (John Boyega), Poe (Oscar Isaac), Rose (Kelly Marie Tran), Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo) and C-3PO (Anthony Daniels). From the start, there's a rush to speed through a complex plot that sends a crowded Millennium Falcon in search of the hidden Sith base, a quest that in-

cludes a series of MacGuffins including — like a relic from a more earthbound adventure — a secret-wielding dagger.

Some of the tropes that Johnson deconstructed have been reassembled. Poe, the Han Solo heir apparent, is again central. New worlds bring new friends — a Stormtrooper-turned-rebel played by Naomi Ackie; an old rival of Poe's named Zorri Bliss (Keri Russell); a cute Muppet-like creature named Babu Frik — and old (Billy Dee Williams' Lando). Many of them make a good impression but the encounters proceed predictably.

To go too much into the narrative of "Rise of Skywalker" isn't necessary and, besides, I'm not totally sure I could explain it all, anyway. That, in itself, is one of the movie's most disappointing aspects: It's trying too hard. What the streaming spinoff "The Mandalorian" has proven (besides that people will go absolutely gaga over infant Jedi Masters) is that simplicity of story line pays in "Star Wars," just as it does in westerns. "Rise of Skywalker" aims for the brilliant parallel action of "Return of the Jedi" but ends up with mounted horse-like creatures charging on the wing of a Star Destroyer. Somewhere, Jar Jar Binks is celebrating. He might not be the most misplaced thing in the galaxy far, far away, after all.

But even if "Rise of Skywalker" has its fair share of missteps, it gets some things right. □

# Slavery museum in Liverpool aims to confront painful legacy

By **RUSSELL CONTRERAS**

**Associated Press**

**LIVERPOOL, England (AP)**—

Scarlet shackles sit peacefully on display in front of a sad, gray backdrop. The now rusted leg irons once locked human ankles during 18th century voyages from Africa to some European port, then to the Americas.

Who the shackles held remain a mystery. But as a citizen of the United States, I've likely broken bread with a descendant of the woman forced to wear this instrument. Maybe my uncle fought alongside her kin in a war. Or it's possible one of her distant relatives is now be my relative.

These are the thoughts I entertain recently while walking through the reflective International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, England. Founded in 2007 on the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade, the museum sits just a short walk from the dry docks where slave trading ships were repaired and fitted out in the 1700s. (And it's close by the The Beatles Story, the world's largest permanent exhibition purely devoted to the hometown band.) Once a major slaving port, Liverpool grew thanks to merchants' financial ties to the enslavement of people to the Americas. Today, the building tells the story of the enslavement of people from Africa and how this British city benefited from human bondage. The Liverpool location reclaims a space once connected to worldwide human suffer and is similar to O Mercado de Escravos — the slavery museum in Lagos, Portugal, where the European slave trade began. But Liverpool's museum is much larger, more interactive, and more ambitious without being exploitative.

Inside, visitors immediately are taken on a meditative experience focusing on Africa before European contact. You are greeted by quotes of American abolitionists and civil rights leaders etched into stone walls before you see tra-



**In this Nov. 24, 2019, photo, a sculpture entitled "Timalle," by French artist Francois Piquet, which tackles the themes of slavery in the Caribbean, is displayed at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, England.**

ditional masks from present-day Sierra Leone and Mali. There are vibrant textiles from Ghana, intricate headdresses from Cameroon and samples of Igbo wall painting from Nigeria. You can listen to samples of drum signals from the Republic of Congo or a Mbuti hunting song. The messages are clear: before enslavement, Africa was a diverse and complex continent with long artistic and religious traditions.

Next, visitors are whisked toward a room tackling enslavement and the brutal Middle Passage. Racial ideologies and Europe's unfamiliarity with the cultures of Africa sparked the slave trade which grew once European powers expanded to the Americas, the museum tells us. In this room, details of the voyage of the ship Essex are reconstructed. That's a slave ship that left Liverpool on June 13, 1783, just nine years after the American Declaration of Independence.

During the Middle Passage portion, visitors encounter shackles and chains used in forts and castles along the African coast to hold humans before their horrific journey.

Then, there was resistance, liberation, and the long fight for civil rights. Surprising, I walked into an area

dedicated to the African American heroes from Harriet Tubman to the Rev. Martin Luther King. Jr. and Malcolm X. U.S. news footage from the 1950s and 1960s illustrates how the descendants of those who crossed the Middle Passage had to fight for human rights and against violence amid white supremacy —

the ideology that launched racialized slavery in the first place. There's also photos of the civil rights struggle in the United Kingdom from London's "Keep Britain White Rally" in 1960 to the Toxteth Riot of 1981 in Liverpool over allegations of police harassment. The museum ends with a space for changing exhib-

its related to the themes around modern-day slavery. During my visit in November, I encountered an exhibition called "Am I not a woman and a sister" — a moving image installation by England-based artist Elizabeth Kwant. She co-created the project with female survivors of modern-day slavery in partnership with Liverpool charity City Hearts. The project links current human trafficking to the story out of the Middle Passage.

In the U.S., journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones has sparked conversations about the legacy of slavery in that nation's history with her interactive 1619 Project in The New York Times.

It examines the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved people from West Africa on the present-day America's eastern shore.

The project challenges readers to consider how their own lives have been shaped by the legacy of slavery and it is helping inspire activists in places like Albuquerque, New Mexico, to push for their own museum of black history. □

**Associated Press**

## 25 years later, Mariah Carey's Christmas original is No. 1

By **The Associated Press**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Christmas has come early for Mariah Carey: the pop star's original holiday classic, "All I Want for Christmas Is You," has reached the No. 1 spot on the Billboard Hot 100 chart 25 years after its release.

Billboard announced that the song topped this week's chart, giving Carey her 19th No. 1 of her career. She is only behind the Beatles, who have had 20 songs top the Hot 100 chart. Each holiday season Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" begins to climb the Billboard charts as its popularity resurfaces. Last year the song hit a peak at No. 3 and set a new one-day streaming record on Spotify.

"All I Want for Christmas Is



**In this Oct. 20, 2019 file photo Mariah Carey performs during a concert celebrating Dubai Expo 2020 One Year to Go in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.**

**Associated Press**

You" is the first holiday to top the Hot 100 chart since "The Chipmunk Song" in 1958-59.

The song is from Carey's 1994 album, "Merry Christmas," which is currently No.

1 on the Billboard R&B albums chart.

Carey wrapped her All I Want for Christmas Is You Tour on Sunday at New York's Madison Square Garden. □

# The Tokyo taxi driver: Suit and tie — white gloves optional

By **STEPHEN WADE**

**Associated Press**

**TOKYO (AP)** — Very few countries deliver better service than Japan: in shops, in restaurants, or in taxis.

It's called "Omotenashi" and translates roughly as hospitality — or offering customers unreserved attention.

Visitors always comment on it. And it's no accident.

Take Tokyo taxi driver Norihito Arima, for instance, as he stands alongside 30 or 40 other drivers at a roll call before his 18-hour shift with the taxi company Nihon Kotsu.

He drives in a suit and tie. White gloves are optional. Drivers are not allowed to have tattoos or wear sunglasses, and men must be clean-shaven. The muster wraps up as drivers — 95% are men — bow toward a small Shinto shrine. And for good measure, they undergo a breathalyzer before hitting the road.

"It's something like the army," Norihito said.

The company also has a booklet for drivers with 77 dos and don'ts: how and when to speak to passengers, taxi sanitation and opening doors for customers. There's even one instructing drivers to keep both hands on the wheel. Taxi service has been a concern at some Olym-



**A Nihon Kotsu taxi passes through the Ginza shopping district of Tokyo on a rainy afternoon, Friday, Nov. 22, 2019.**

**Associated Press**

pics: poorly trained drivers, dilapidated cars, and sloppy dress. A decade ago in Beijing, the government published edicts for drivers to stop spitting, clean their taxis, and warned about eating on the job.

Customers also got lessons on waiting in line and not jumping ahead.

This shouldn't be at problem at next year's Tokyo Olympics.

"Japanese people have a pride in this service," Norihito said in an interview with The Associated Press. "In the western notion, an indi-



**Norihito Arima, a 33-year-old taxi driver working for Nihon Kotsu, one of the largest taxi companies in Japan, takes off his tie after returning from his graveyard shift Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2019, in Tokyo.**

**Associated Press**



**Norihito Arima, a 33-year-old taxi driver working for Nihon Kotsu, one of the largest taxi companies in Japan, puts on white gloves in his taxi while getting ready to work Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2019, in Tokyo.**

**Associated Press**

"People get drunk and sometimes they throw up in the car, and we have to clean up the car," Norihito explained. He said he routinely offers a specially designed bag to unsteady customers.

If that doesn't work, and it's what he termed, "small damage," he can clean it up and keep driving. If it's too bad, this automatically ends his shift, the rest of which goes to cleaning up the mess.

Norihito said the "damage" occurs a couple of times a year and, under company policy, drivers are told not to collect fares from these customers. Why create more problems?

He said it's not easy to avoid the heavy drinkers. With few exceptions, the law requires drivers to pick up customers requesting a ride. Also, it's impossible to ignore a customer if a reservation has been booked ahead of time.

"We just can't do anything about it," he said. "Go back and clean it up, and that's it."

Norihito has an MBA and speaks English fluently. For drivers who don't, the company has a tablet to assist with language and a hotline for translation emergencies.

Drivers can earn about 50,000-60,000 yen — about \$450-550 — in a typical 18-hour shift. Drivers keep half and the company gets the other half.

Norihito acknowledged that when he started driving three years ago — he gave up a "boring office job" as a data analyst — he barely knew his way around Greater Tokyo, an area of about 35 million.

"I couldn't tell Shibuya from Shinjuku," he said, despite passing a test that was much less rigorous than, say, London's famous "The Knowledge" exam for taxi drivers.

"There is no easy job in Japan, but relatively I feel comfortable doing this job," he said. "I like it because I can do it by myself. Sure, there are problems but I don't need to get involved in office politics." □

vidual is independent. But we Japanese are homogeneous. We think of each other as part of the society, the community. So the honor we get as a group is part of the honor each member gets."

Japan is not perfect, of course. Commuters often push to get on crowded subway trains or bump into anonymous strangers on the sidewalk without apology. Westerners usually receive great service, but some other non-Japanese complain they do not.

Japan has a low crime rate, which is good news for taxis drivers. But nocturnal Tokyo presents a heavy-drinking culture that can — literally — wind up in the laps of taxi drivers who work overnight, as Norihito does.